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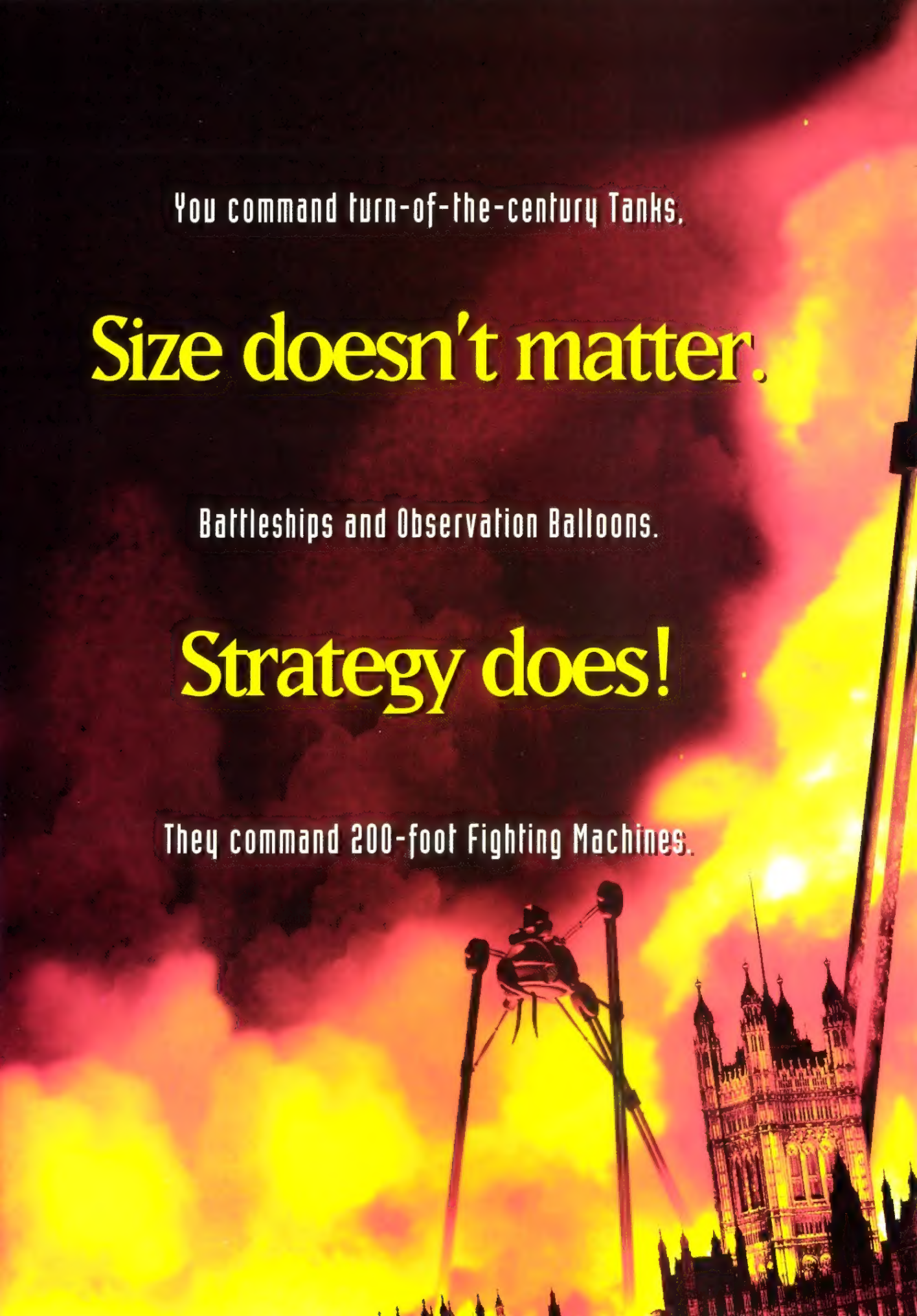
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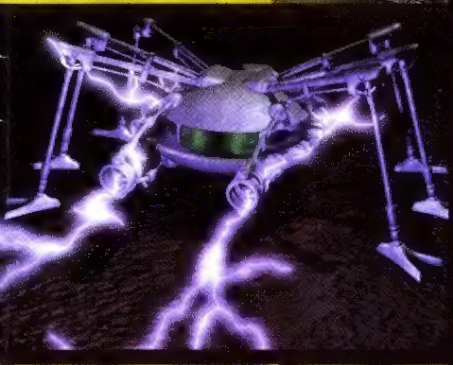

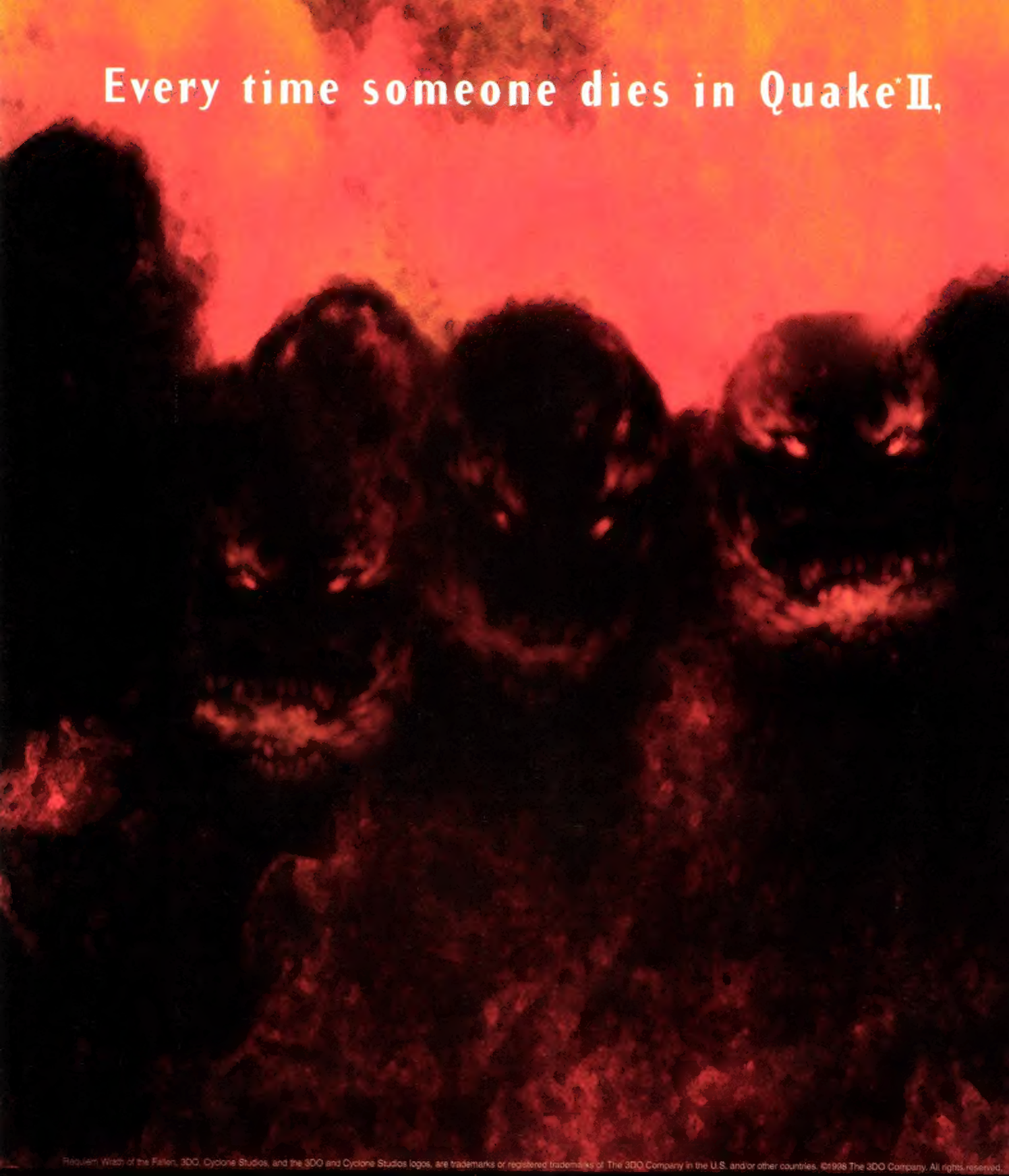

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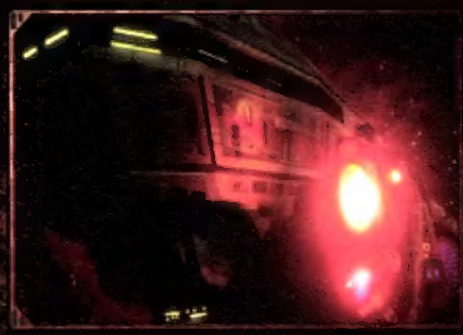

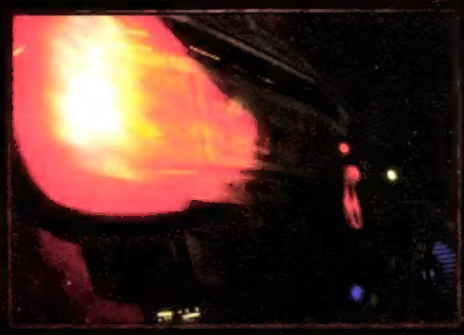

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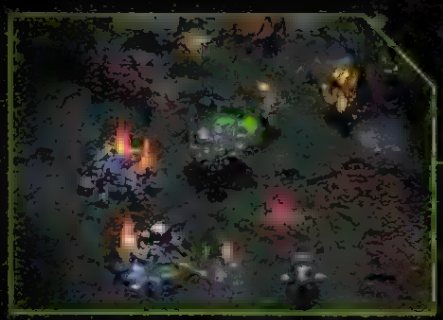

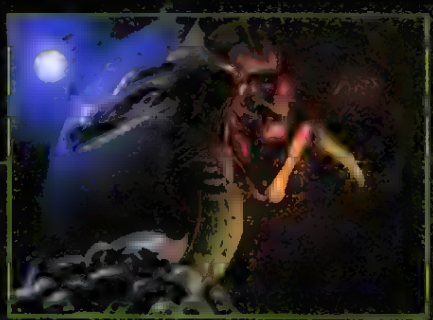

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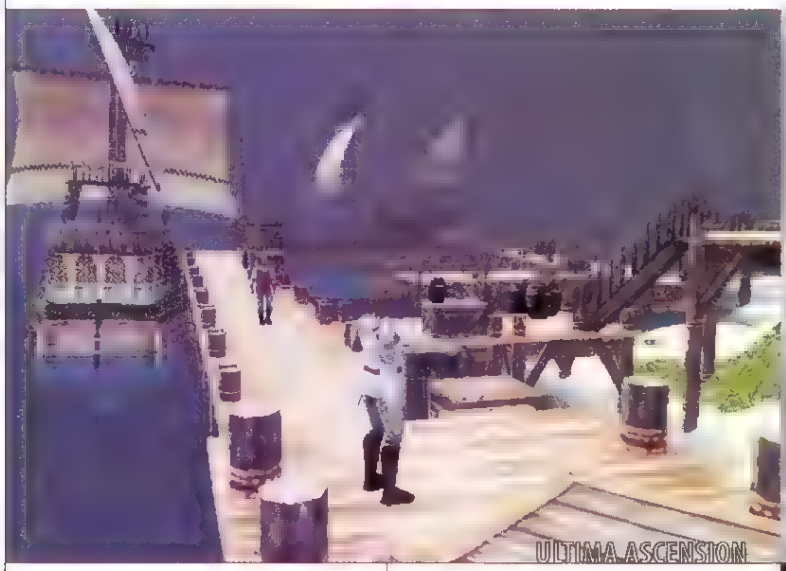
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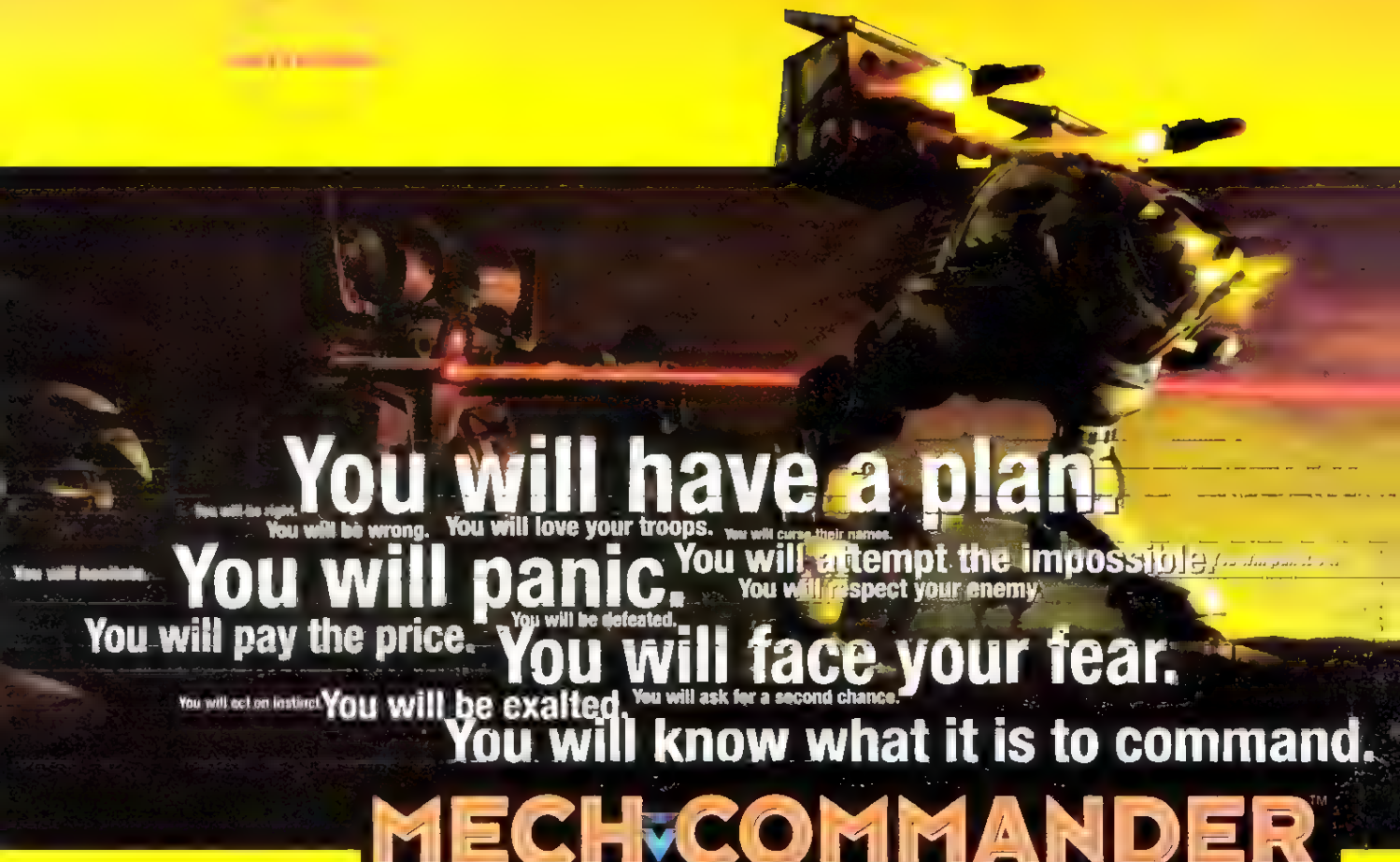
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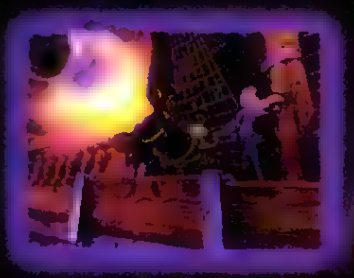

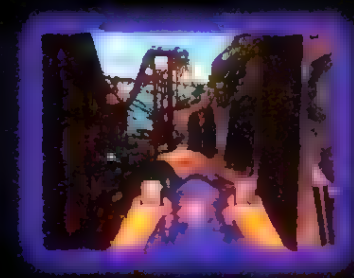

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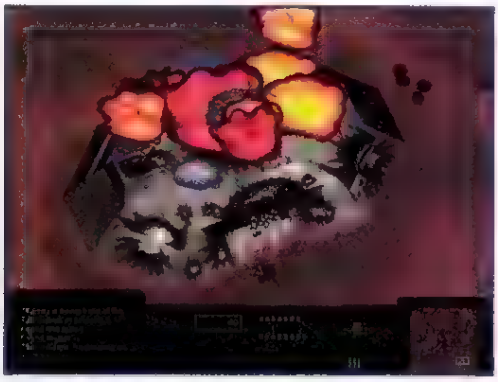

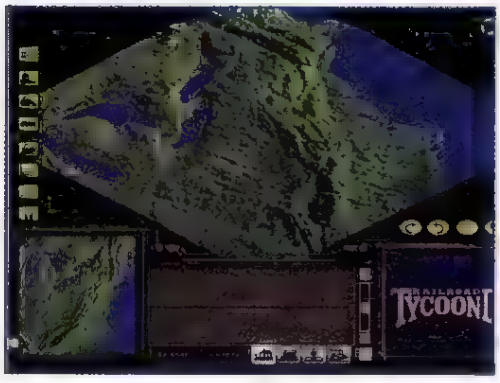

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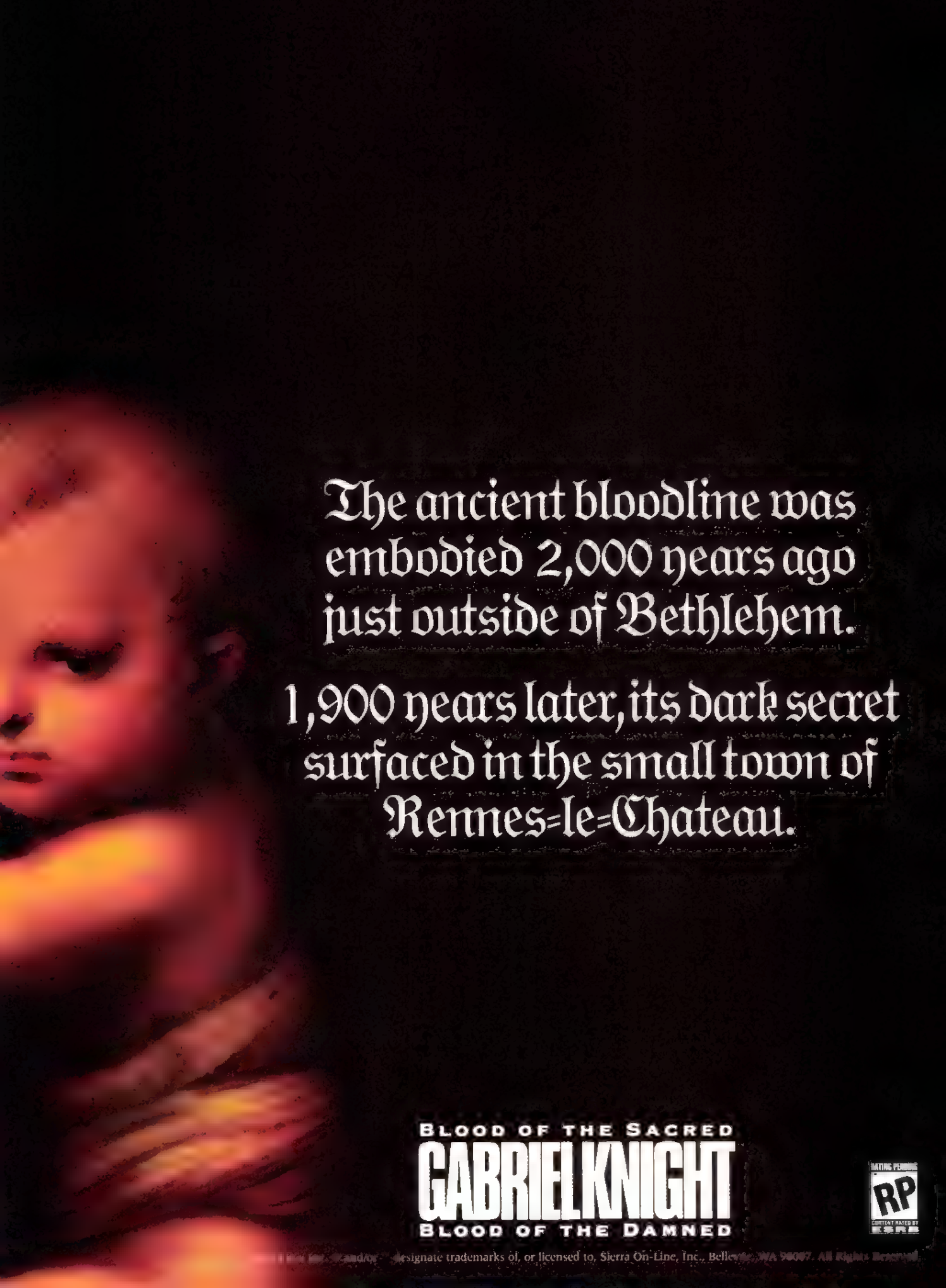
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The technology race

As new hardware energizes the industry, gameplay wilts By Steve Bauman

Every few years, a new technology energizes the industry. Past energizers included crowd favorites like 256 color graphics, SVGA, CD-ROM, and full-motion video. The latest "big thing" is 3D acceleration. Game companies, realizing that technology is easier to market than gameplay, rush to market with half hearted products to take advantage of these emerging technologies. An extremely vocal minority of hardware elitists egg them on, vociferously complaining when companies don't support their favorite new toy. The press, never wanting to miss the "next big thing," jump on the bandwagon, following, rather than helping direct, the industry. The only thing lost in this rush to adopt new technology is the reason most of us actually play games—new and interesting gameplay.

The hardware elitists are the people who prefer technology to gameplay, the people who are more concerned whether or not a game supports 3D acceleration than if it's fun to play. While they would never admit any of this, they're easy to spot—they spend more time talking about polygons per second than detailed strategies. They're all usually easily identifiable by the number of times they use the term "kick-ass" (hey, let's have a moratorium on this inane saying, OK?). They memorize hardware benchmark results, for their own machines as well as the competition. They take sides on the eternal debates: Glide vs. Direct3D vs. OpenGL, 3Dfx vs. nVidia vs. Rendition. They'll scream until blue in the face why *Quake II* is better at 800x600 than at 640x480. They move from demo to demo (do they actually buy any games?), discussing how the game performs on their overclocked, SDRAM-equipped, 100MHz bussed screamer. (They have this habit of describing their hardware in excruciating detail, no matter how irrelevant it may be to the discussion.) However, they're never happy with their machines and are always looking for an extra unit of frame rate, another MHz of power.

The industry also is more than happy to focus on technology. Gameplay is abstract—a screenshot says everything you'd ever want to know about a game's visuals, but trying to explain a fantastic AI design requires creativity. If a company can release a "technology demo" on the Internet (they used to call these things public beta tests, but the new term is much sexier) that shows a certain degree of technological prowess, they're virtually guaranteed months of discussions, and perhaps some anticipation of a game's release. (There seems to be a correlation between a game's technological prowess and its anticipation level.)

The role of the press is perhaps the most depressing, because we're supposed to be on your side. Instead, we often find ourselves describing products solely in terms of its technology in both reviews and previews. Again, this is due in part to a lack of creativity on our part, but there's also an industry-wide reluctance to discuss that great abstraction, gameplay. Still, any good journalist has a duty to present a balanced story to the reader. We can do better.

Having seen my own fair share of ground breaking technology, it's tempting to get caught up in the buzz. It's safe to say that everyone, from the most jaded gamer to the most cynical member of the press corps, loves the fabulous graphics the talented programmers and artists are able to pump out of today's hardware. No one is immune to the lure of fast and attractive 3D accelerated graphics. We constantly fight with ourselves to remember that there's more to gaming than pretty pictures. (There is some irony that these same hardware elitists laugh off a game like *Myst* as nothing but a bunch of pretty pictures while themselves lavishing untold affection on the visuals found in games like *Quake II* and *Unreal*.)

However, in focusing solely on the technological aspects of entertainment software, we're assisting its decline into technology demos masquerading as games. Despite all of the temptations it presents, we need to make sure we never forget that technology isn't the game—it merely serves the game. It's the difference between *Shadow Master* and *Jedi Knight*, or *Conquest Earth* and *StarCraft*. Some developers seem to have lost the distinction between the two things, and gamers may be next. ■

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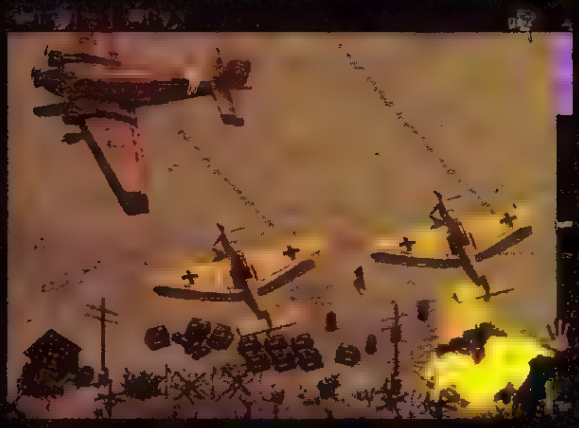
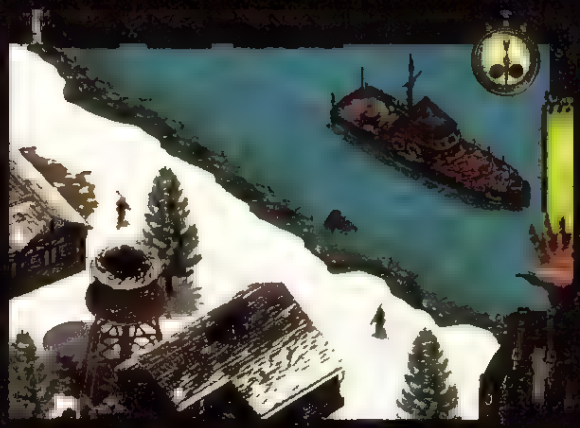


Intense real-time tactical combat



Mountain, Desert, Beach and Snow terrains

Name	Russell Hancock
A.K.A.	Inferno
Nationality	British
Primary Skill	Explosives/munitions
Background	Very quiet demeanor. Keeps to himself. Explosive temper can result in unpredictable behavior.

Name	Sir Francis Woolridge
A.K.A.	Duke
Nationality	British
Primary Skill	Marksman
Background	Cold and calculating character. His commitment to the team intensified after his sister was killed in a German bombing raid.

Name	Jerry McHale
A.K.A.	Tiny
Nationality	American
Primary Skill	Use of blades/close combat
Background	Extremely violent temper when provoked. Loves to read poetry to relax. Afraid of dogs.

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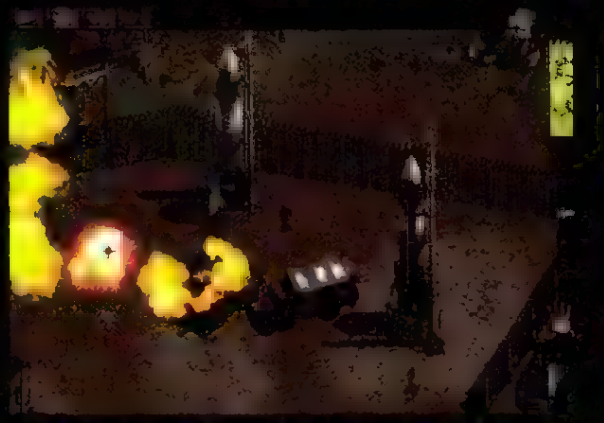
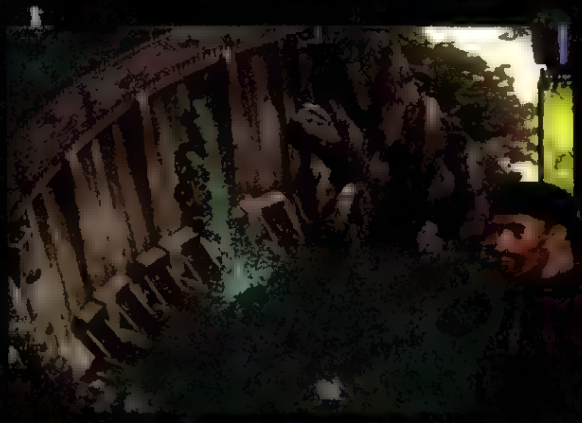


24 missions throughout Europe and Africa



You're in control—
Commandos work for you!

Name	Sid Perkins
A.K.A	Tread
Nationality	American
Special Skill	Vehicle mechanic/driver
Background	Mistrustful character. Has poor relationships with teammates. Loves a fine Cuban between raids.

Name	Rene Duchamp
A.K.A	Spooky
Nationality	French
Primary Skill	Linguist
Background	Aside from an absolute hatred toward Nazis, quite an amiable character. Speaks five languages fluently. Great with women.

Name	James Blackwood
A.K.A.	Fins
Nationality	Australian
Primary Skill	Champion swimmer/sailer
Background	Dissolute character. Vows to have alcohol problem under control. Could figure out a way to make an anvil float.

Behind Enemy Lines

COMMANDOS

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

I HAVE AN ENORMOUS TANK BATTALION.
I HAVE AN ARSENAL OF WEAPONS AT MY FINGERTIPS.
I'VE DESTROYED BUILDINGS IN MY WAY.
SO WHY
I AM ONE WITH THE CROSSHAIRS.
I AM A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH.

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I'VE TELEPORTED INTO MY SATELLITE.
I'VE DRIVEN MY VEHICLES LIKE A MANIAC.
AM I DEAD?
I HAVE THE FIERCE AIR FORCE.
I TORCHED A TAERKAST BIPLANE.
I KNOW HOW TO DEFEND MY HOST STATION.
It's the perfect blend of action and strategy that you can make even more challenging with multiplayer capabilities. So use that gray matter. Or you'll lose it. Think yourself over to www.microsoft.com/games/urbanassault
URBAN ASSAULT

GameStorm-y weather

Navigating the rough waters of online gaming–By André Vrignaud

Air Warrior III on GameStorm now supports 3D hardware acceleration

Pricing models for online gaming have always been of concern to consumers as well as to the industry at large. As such, we've seen almost ideological battles over which service type is best, and over the benefits each brings to the consumer. As these battles have raged, the services have shifted their thinking a few times. One of those shifts created GameStorm, which is what we'll be looking at in this column.

GameStorm is a collaboration between Kesmai and SegaSoft's HEAT.NET. Kesmai and SegaSoft originally launched GameStorm with the basic idea that it's expensive to run an online gaming service, and that it was necessary to charge something to cover those costs...however, it was also considered important to give value to the user. To this end, Kesmai pulled together a great deal of content, including their large scale multiplayer games, HEAT.NET's support for action titles, and *GameSpot*'s editorial content, and offered unlimited use of all of this for $9.95 a month.

We had an opportunity to speak with Chris Holden, the CEO of Kesmai, and asked him for his thoughts on some topics. To start, we asked him his thoughts on how GameStorm had done to date, along with how the industry as a whole stands.

"It will be a very long time before we know if it is possible to have a viable multiplayer games business on the web," he says. "Over $100 million has been lost thus far by the companies attempting to pursue some form of multiplayer gaming online. The main problem is that CD-ROM matchmaking, which is free all over the net, has been marketed as 'multiplayer' gaming, and in our view it simply is not. We believe 'true' multiplayer gaming to be online-only, true client/server (unhackable), deep, immersive, persistent 'worlds' that can support hundreds or thousands of participants simultaneously. [...] It is totally different from what the 'dating services' such as TEN, Mpath, and the Internet Gaming Zone offer. Those services must be free because the matchmaking they provide is free all over the Internet. They are hoping advertising will support their businesses, but the plain fact is that advertising can supply only about 10% of the revenue they need to survive. We are approaching this very differently, saying to our customers from the get-go: 'We are going to provide you with something of real value that you can't get anywhere else, and we appreciate that you will pay a modest price for this value.' This is working great so far, and we will stick with this philosophy."

Obviously, GameStorm believes very strongly that the future of online gaming lies more in the large-scale online environments than in peer-to-peer games. Considering Kesmai's strong large scale game background (with titles such as *Air Warrior*, *Aliens Online*, and *Multiplayer Battletech*), this isn't particularly surprising. However, we were curious as to what Holden thought about some of the other services, and what they offered.

On TEN, Holden said, "Great first move toward leagues with [the] PGL, though my opinion is that due to its highly exclusive 'professional' nature, it will remain very small. In general, TEN is a matchmaking service, and has no choice but to offer this service for free and hope that someday advertising will support such a business."

Of course, TEN is currently charging for some of their content, but I'd have to agree with Holden that long-term, most of TEN's matchmaking content will be free.

Holden on Mplayer: "Same as TEN matchmaking only, hoping for advertising revenue to arrive pronto. They are making some noises about beginning to offer massively multiplayer persistent worlds games, but I don't see how they'll do it. Developing the massively multiplayer platform (what we call Aries) takes five years and twenty to thirty million dollars."

And finally, on the free services he has this to say. "These are specifically designed to support network/matchmaking play of CD-ROM titles developed by these publishers. They are not 'services,' per se, and will not become full services. They are designed to be as simple and inexpensive to operate as possible, because they are pure cost centers, operating under the theory that offering a dedicated matchmaking site for a specific CD-ROM title will enhance sales of that CD-ROM title enough to offset the cost of operating the matchmaking site. It remains to be seen whether this model is sustainable for these publishers." As a side-note, Blizzard recently announced that their battle.net costs are now completely supported by advertising revenue brought in from the site.

GameStorm's pricing structure is definitely attractive, and over time it's hoped that the large-scale online worlds that Kesmai does so well continue to evolve and draw in more people. If the games are good, the people will come, and after all, the price is right! ■

GameStorm's web interface is very reminiscent of Mplayer's

Aliens Online is one of GameStorm's new movie-inspired titles; look for Godzilla Online

I DEPLOYED MY GUYS USING THE TRANSPARENT MAP.

I TOLD MY GUYS TO ATTACK FROM BOTH FLANKS.

I KNOW WHERE THE TECH UPGRADE SECTOR IS.

I KNOW WHERE TO PLACE MY HOST STATION.

I KNOW WHERE THE POWER STATIONS ARE.

SO WHY AM I STILL DEAD?

I SAW A MYKONIAN CUBOID FORMATION.

I'M BEING SMART ABOUT MY MOVES.

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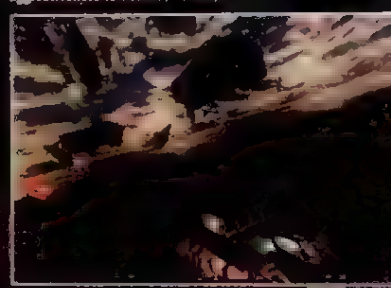

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EVERYONE E ESRB

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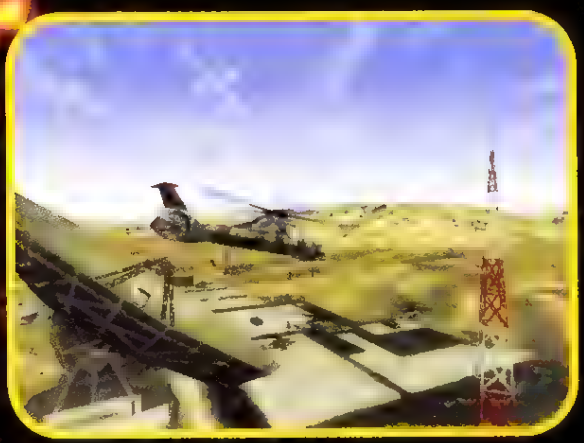

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Kinder, gentler gaming

How to get more people into the strategy genre–By Scott Udell

Sorry!, one of Hasbro's board recreations; "traditional" boardgame conversions like this are one way to introduce non-computer gamers to computer strategy gaming

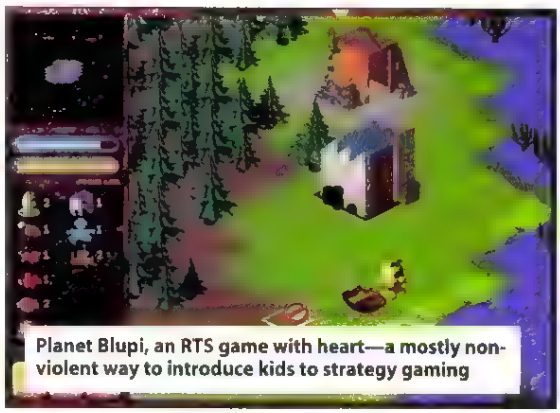
I've begun to get some responses from my column in the June issue (No. 91, "Old designers never die: Where's the 'young blood' in computer wargaming"), and while it's too early to say, things are a tad disturbing, at least from the wargaming front: only a few of the respondents so far are actually younger wargamers (ironically, their responses have been some of the most cogent), while many of the rest are old farts like *moi* who said they got their start in wargaming when they were young (which was exactly my point). Of course, it's still early, and this is about as far from a statistically accurate survey as you can get, so who knows whether conclusions can be drawn or not; nevertheless, much of what the respondents have said is interesting, and I'll cover it in a future column once responses have stopped coming in.

But this all ties in with something I've been pondering a while, how people get into strategy gaming in general. It is certainly a popular genre; at last year's E3 show, the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) handed out a report that showed strategy as potentially the biggest genre on PCs (although strategy, action, and adventure/RPGs are all pretty close), and on our own website *Computer Games Online* (www.cdmag.com), strategy and action trade off as the most popular genres (measured by hit count). Still, a lot of gamers in the past have felt isolated from strategy gaming, especially the more violent games of the genre (which have increased in recent years). But there are plenty of games, typically poo-pooed by the hardcore, that are both less violent and, coincidentally, serve as a good introduction to the genre.

Games from Hasbro are a great example. Go onto a Usenet forum like comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.strategic and discuss a Hasbro game (except maybe *Risk* or the upcoming *Axis & Allies*) and you're likely to take some heat from the hardcore. Nevertheless, these games are a great way to bring someone into computer strategy gaming—who hasn't played *Monopoly* at some point? They're familiar, which is good; even better, the computer versions often offer something extra, maybe slightly more complex—and once a new strategy gamer has taken them on perhaps they'll be ready for something closer to the hardcore of the genre. And I assume it's working in some fashion—*Monopoly* has been on the best seller lists since it's introduction nearly three years ago (and this is the same version—no *Monopoly Gold* or *Monopoly II*). True, plenty of folks never move beyond *Monopoly*, but that's OK—they're still in the genre, and many of them (especially younger folks just getting started in gaming) will move on to more complex games when they may never have without the introduction provided by a game like *Monopoly* (Hasbro games act, in essence, like a *Deer Hunter* for strategy gaming—see Steve Bauman's Upfront from last month's issue).

Another way to get new strategy gamers is through simplified versions of currently popular game forms. For example, I've played through several missions of the thoroughly cute *Planet Blupi* (from Swiss developer Epsitec, published in the U.S. by Telegames). For any regular player of real time strategy games it's a cake walk—the first ten of 30 missions took only an hour or so to complete—but it's a great way to introduce someone to the concepts of RTS games. It is also basically "kid friendly," something that's a bit of a double edged sword: on the one hand it's very low violence, but it may also be a bit too "kiddy oriented" for an adult to swallow, even if they need its simplified nature. Perhaps someone should consider a low-cost, but simple introductory game that a prideful adult wouldn't be embarrassed to play.

Lastly, there are the games that aren't necessarily simple, but are non-violent. Even though it's a misuse of the term "strategy," the genre can and does encompass non warfare oriented games. *SimCity* is perhaps the most famous example of this, although games like *Railroad Tycoon* and it's upcoming sequel certainly rank up there too. Indeed, games like *Railroad Tycoon II* or the upcoming *3D Railroad Master* from Abracadata, games which encompass another theme (trains in this case) can also draw fans from whole other interest areas into strategy gaming... I say the more the merrier. ■



Planet Blupi, an RTS game with heart—a mostly non-violent way to introduce kids to strategy gaming

3D Railroad Master (arguably more a sim than a strategy game) is an example of the non-violent side of the genre that is nevertheless attractive to adults

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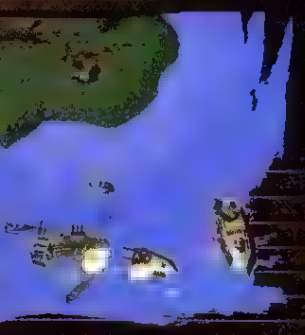

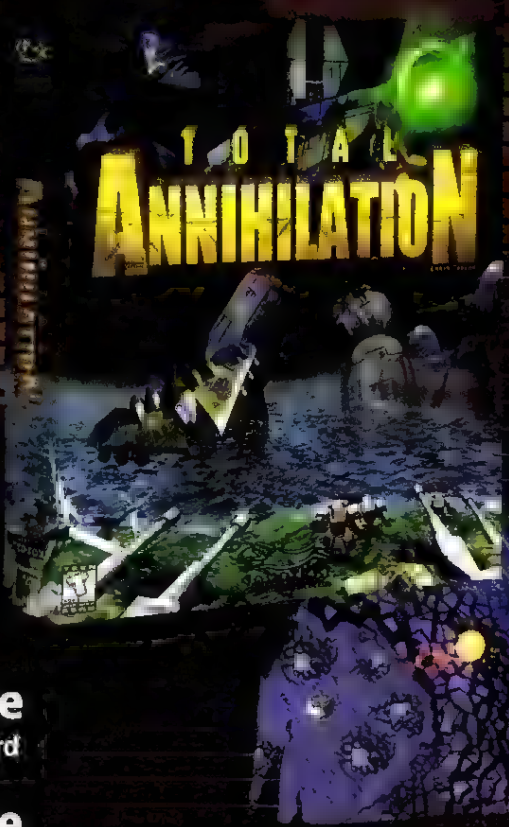

Game of the Year
–GameSpot Editors

Game of the Year
–GameSpot Reader's Choice Awards

Best Real-Time Strategy Game
–PC Gamer On-Line, Reader's Choice Award

Best Real-Time Strategy Game
–Adrenaline Vault

Best Real-Time Strategy Game
–Ultra Game Player's magazine

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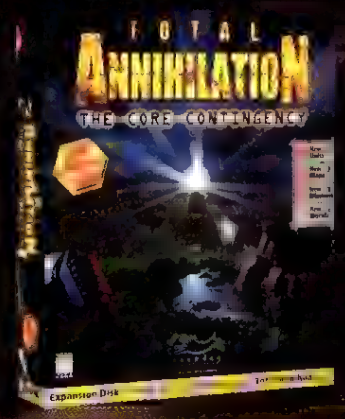

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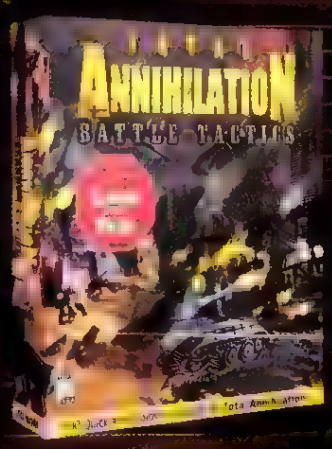


*Computer Game Entertainment

Mainstream marketing

Adventure gaming corporate style–By Cindy Yans

It appeared mysteriously one day. In the UPS truck. Next Day Air. Printed on its lid was a circular, bronze, studded plaque, imprinted with mysterious symbols. Its return address was in Atlanta, GA. Terrified to open it, I called security. "Unidentified package. Looks suspicious. Send bomb squad." But before they arrived, curiosity set in. I lifted the lid, and there it was: A 20 oz bottle of Cherry Coke; and one, no, two game CDs; and press information in an exotic brown font on expensive-looking parchment: "Embark today on an intriguing quest across the lost island of Alanna to solve the mysteries of an ancient civilization."

Cherry Coke? Was the game going to make us thirsty? Finally it sank in. The Coca-Cola Company was not only supplying the beverage, they were supplying the game. Perhaps this shouldn't have been surprising, but a mega-corporation like Coca-Cola moving into game production? Sure, Mattel and Hasbro and, gulp, WizardWorks (!?) have done their part in feeding games to the mainstream of late, but what does Coca-Cola feel they have to gain from game production? Oh, of course. Marketing. It doesn't get more mainstream than this. We can now await AT&T's "Reach Out and Touch Someone" 3D combat game.

The Lost Island of Alanna is an adventure/puzzle game that is being distributed to the masses as freeware. You can get it at supermarkets, you can get it through Cherry Coke sampling programs, you can get it through local bottlers, you can download it from www.cherrycoke.com, or you can be one of the (get this) more than 700,000 lucky recipients who are being targeted through direct mail. They may even make fine coasters like AOL disks.

I spoke with Cherry Coke brand managers Tim Halloran and Mart Martin in Atlanta to see what led to their decision to produce an adventure game. "I think you're going to see that computers and the Internet are an emerging trend [*think so?*], says Halloran, "and we have found that the bulk of our consumption comes from kids 12-18. Since we know that that consumer spends a large amount of their time online, and playing computer games and surfing the net, we thought, 'Wow! what a great way to hit our consumer by utilizing the net and doing something that they enjoy doing.'"

Together with Dale Leary and his team from Fusion 5 Innovation Marketing, they produced a small adventure game that is a little bit *Myst* a little bit *Qin* and a little bit under budgeted—which shows, but hey, the game is free. It's a small bit of good will from the Big Boys in Atlanta who have identified the group that is slurping up all of their sugar and caffeine (Diet Cherry Coke is not a part of this promotion).

"If you're looking for help solving the puzzles in the game, the first thing that will help you are specially marked 20 oz. and one-liter bottles of Cherry Coke. Collect as many of these as you can, because different clues are on different bottles."

However, Calloran promises that no overt or subliminal "Drink Coke" messages appear in the game. Another thing that will help you is visiting the Cherry Coke website. Here you will find a clue-filled Standlake University journal which contains excerpts from a study about Alanna (a fictional island created by the designers, but based on other civilizations that existed during the time of the Babylonian empire).

Most puzzles are the "get through the barrier" variety, and (to elucidate for the squeamish) include chess-type puzzles, and sliding tile puzzles. The game has no music, limited sound effects, and a four-direction-per-screen-three-of which-usually-go-nowhere "navigation system." Install Shield runs every time you insert the disk, and there are numerous software glitches and an occasional crash. So download the patch immediately. But again, you can't complain. They've sent it to you free of charge. They've sent you *two* of them. One for you and one for a friend. And if you're 12-18, and not a hardcore gamer, you might even enjoy yourself.

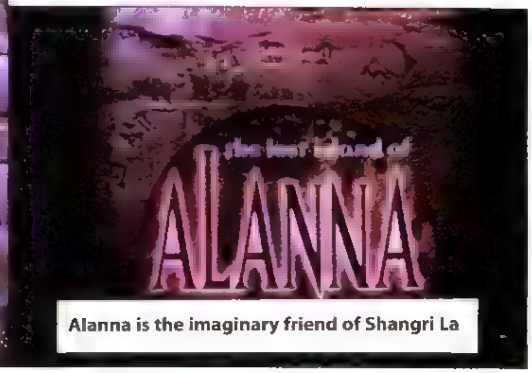
Designer Dale Leary hinted that Coke's 1999 project will be a real-time strategy game. Although this was not wholly confirmed by the brand managers, we can just picture The Hand of Coke vs. P.E.P.S.I., with little Coke and Pepsi cans moving along waypoints through a sea of cola. The three liter size has plenty of hit points, and can take out those aluminum six packs with a single blow. And when you poke them with the cursor, they say stuff like, "Coke is it." "Coke is it." "It's the real thing, baby." ■

The pause that refreshes

An institution since the 1800s

A chess puzzle in disguise

Levers, sticks and rotating wheels...How Myst of them



Alanna is the imaginary friend of Shangri La

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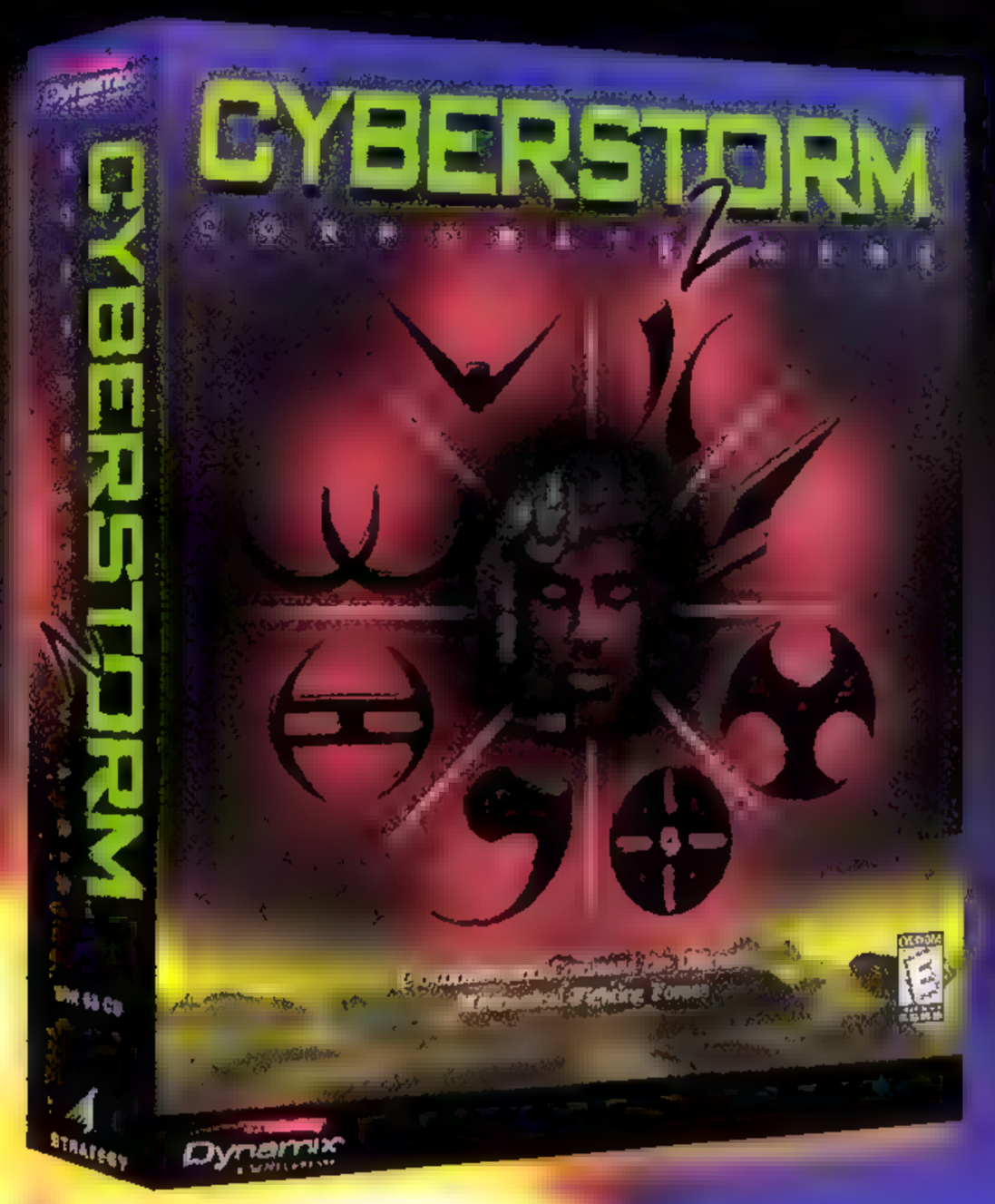
The critics agree. Cyberstorm 2: Corporate Wars is the ultimate game of mass destruction and total control – for gamers who love deeply-layered strategic warfare

The critically-acclaimed sequel to Missionforce: Cyberstorm, Cyberstorm 2 is a double-barreled combination of intense tactical action and more opportunities for customization than any other game of its kind. And it's the only game around that gives you a choice between turn-based and real time play.

You can't lose with Cyberstorm 2. But don't take our word for it. As Marcus Sears of *All About Games* put it: "I strongly recommend Cyberstorm 2 for every strategy gamer. It's got that **'Just one more mission'** quality that keeps you playing until the wee hours of the morning."

Turn-based and real-time gameplay.



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Everyone likes a winner.

Winner: Killer Game Award, The Cheater's Guild

4 1/2 out of 5

"Cyberstorm was a great game and Cyberstorm 2: Corporate Wars takes the premise to a higher level. Real-time or turn-based play and dynamic mission generators for infinite replay value – it just doesn't get any better than this."

Winner: Editor's Choice, All About Games

95 out of 100

"Dynamix has got a real winner on their hands. Cyberstorm 2 is positively awesome! With over 170 weapons (and more than 300 weapons plus devices), the ability to engineer your own Bioderm, the non-fixed research tree, and all the new chassis to play around with, and the dynamic campaign engine, plus multi-player capability, Cyberstorm 2 has nearly infinite replayability."

More, Much More... GamePen

"Break out the Bioderms and churn out the chassis, the war has begun anew in Dynamix's upcoming strategy game, Cyberstorm 2: Corporate Wars. This sequel to Missionforce: Cyberstorm still allows players to create pilots, configure their HERCs and engage in turn-based conflicts, but now there's more. Much more."

Up the Wazoo PC Games

"Here's where Cyberstorm 2 gets interesting. While you don't have to fiddle with it, this game has customization up the wazoo. In the factory where you build your HERCs, you can tweak the specs to your heart's content! Normally, the computer AI would handle all this for you, but if you like to tinker with every little nuance, you can't get more into the

Before its time

A dual-use phrase for the sim community–By Ben Chiu

The point-and-click cockpit of Jane's F-15 helps tame much of the complexity of a real F-15E

The phrase "before its time" is one of those clichés that traditional diametrically opposed professions such as ad agencies and critics tend to (over) use. It's probably because the phrase by itself has dual meanings—to praise forward thinking or scorn premature introduction. For an example of the latter, last month I hinted at releasing software before it's ready. An illustration of the former would be a sim that's too advanced for today's level of computing horsepower. Of course depending on which side of the time scale you stand on, the phrase in question can be taken as a compliment or harsh criticism. As with most things, there're additional simulation facets that can be described by this same three-word phrase. However, their meanings may not be so clear-cut.

It's probably pretty obvious to even the most casual sim fans that simulations which model yet to be produced or presently emerging aircraft rely quite a bit on speculation. The data that's used to model features such as flight parameters and advanced weapons systems may not even exist at the time of development for the simulation. But what many fail to realize is that even with existing aircraft and weapons systems in current military inventory, much of their performance abilities are still classified (real "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you" stuff) Surprisingly enough, a good example of this is something very generic to modern air combat sims—missiles. Just about everything about missiles including related detection avoidance doctrine, range, top airspeed, maneuverability, spoofing and jamming techniques (especially ECM—Electronic Countermeasures) as well as reliability (probability of success/kill) are still officially classified for many of these weapons. As you might imagine, replacing a few of the missing tidbits of performance data could critically alter a simulation's experience.

Although this is clearly a case of some sims existing before their time, in this case it's actually a good thing. As battlefield technology marches on, it wouldn't be unreasonable to believe that missiles may soon (of course assuming that the AIM-9X hasn't already) reach near perfect performance What fun would modern combat sims be if 99 8% of the missiles you let off the rails kills its target? While advanced anti radar detection techniques and super gizmos should offset any deficiencies in gameplay over "conventional" sim missile modeling, until this type of information becomes unclassified such lapses in realism actually increases gameplay. Considering that simulations pride themselves on realism this shouldn't surprise any of you because realistic or not, the bottom line is if the sim isn't fun *most* people won't play it. (Keep in mind that "fun" is often attributed to different things for different people.)

On another front, one of the latest trends in flight sim features these days is the point and-click cockpit. *Flight Simulator 98*, *iF 22v.5.0*, and *F 15* are just a couple of recent titles to have this advanced feature. Unfortunately what's become clear is pointing and clicking around with a mouse is one of the most unnatural things a sim'er can be asked to do in their virtual cockpits. (The majority of us are still amazed by those who can fly well using only a mouse and keyboard!) Once a simulation asks you to grab a mouse, it takes you right out of the sim (thank goodness we usually always have the option of using compound key command instead). As Kesmai's Jonathan Baron put it, it's the job of simulation designer to try and create a seamless world Once you ask the user to do something that's not part of that world, you've destroyed the illusion

The convenience of a pointing and clicking is obvious, but until touch screen monitors become commonplace and, for instance, using your finger to press an MFD (Multi Function Display) push button becomes possible, using a mouse for these actions is actually a step backwards. That's because it makes the process more complicated than it is in real life. Of course simulations are chock full of such hardware interface limitations and products like Saitek's PC-Dash help fill the gap, but perhaps something like Jeppesen Sanderson's (the company equivalent of a Thomas Guide for aviating the skies) simulator hardware is the future but only time will tell. ■

As simulators become more and more complex, hardware similar to Jeppesen Sanderson's FS-200 simulator may become essential to the simulation experience

MOTOCROSS MADNESS

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Sick stunts and even sicker crashes. 16 get-some-serious-air stunts, like the outrageous Heel Clicker and insane Nac-Nac. Loads of notify-your-next-of-kin wipeouts. Either way you land it, you're a crowd favorite.

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Choose a track. Or not. Over 30 tracks, including Supercross, Nationals, Baja, and the dreaded Stunt Quarry, plus off-track terrain that's so hairy you may find yourself saying, "Track? What track?"

Boredom is a four-letter word. You'll constantly admire the mind-messingly photorealistic environment, whether you're face-down in the dirt or 20 feet in the air. And keep it all fresh with a built-in track editor and 8-person multiplayer capability.

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Motocross Madness™ requires a 3-D card.

Microsoft

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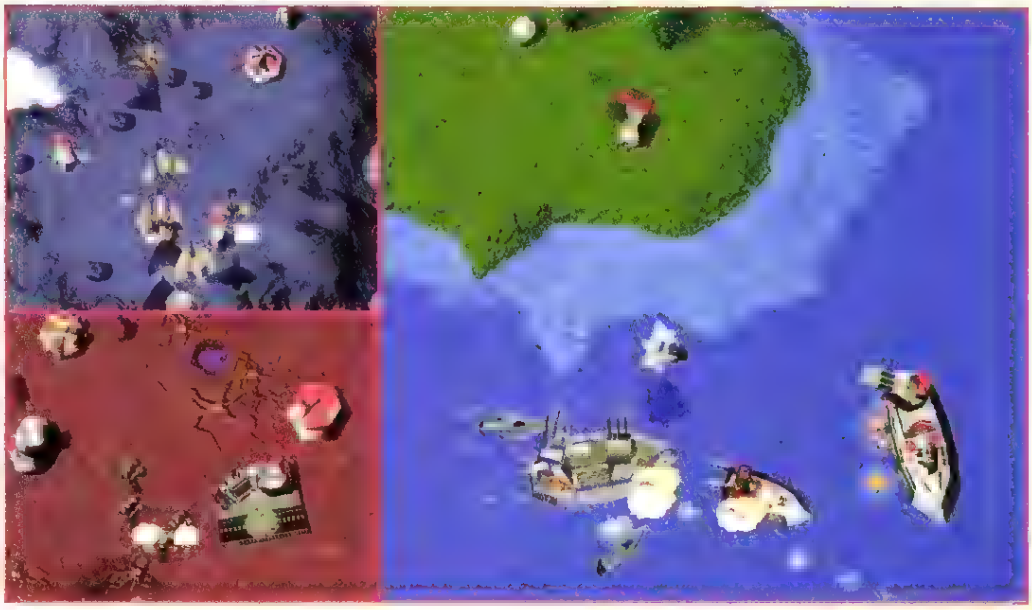
CG-CDROM

Total Annihilation: Battle Tactics

Total Annihilation has been heralded as one of the few Clone & Conquer titles that have actually been really good, or at least, really popular. *TA* brought many new options and features to the genre, one of the most important being the use of 3D terrain and units. This demo gives you a taste of some of the new missions and maps available in Cavedog's new add on, *Total Annihilation: Battle Tactics*.



REQUIREMENTS

Windows 95,133MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM
Cavedog Entertainment • www.cavedog.com
Technical Support: 425-487-0505

MechCommander

REQUIREMENTS

Windows 95, 133MHz Pentium, 16MB RAM
MicroProse • www.microprose.com
Technical Support: 510-522-1164

MechCommander is the highly anticipated real-time strategy offering from MicroProse, based on the *Battletech*™ Universe. You're in command of a unit of MechWarriors, assigned to retake the planet Port Arthur from rival clan Smoke Jaguar. Up to 24 mechs can be involved in battle at once, and there are over 30 different missions to choose from in the full retail version. The demo includes two unique missions to give you a taste of *MechCommander*'s tactical gameplay.

Descent: FreeSpace - The Great War

Interplay had an instant classic on their hands when they released the original *Descent*. After a successful sequel, they now hope to take the battle out into space, with *Descent: Freespace The Great War*. Not only will you be able to fly spacecraft in ship to ship combat, but you'll be able to command your flight in this epic space battle. This is a three mission branchable demo.

REQUIREMENTS

Windows 95, 166Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
Interplay • www.interplay.com
Technical Support: 714-553-6678

Jane's F-15

Produced by Andy Hollis, of *F15 Strike Eagle* and *AH-64D Longbow* fame, *Jane's F-15* is one of the latest combat sims from Jane's Combat Simulations With incredibly detailed, realistic graphics and avionics, *F 15* is on the leading edge of technology for PC flight sims. This demo is a small taste of what to expect from the full version, and lets you fly one single mission. The default settings are for casual flight

REQUIREMENTS

Windows 95, 133 MHz Pentium (with 3Dfx card), or 166MHz Pentium (without 3Dfx card), 16 MB RAM
Origin • www.origin.com
Technical Support: 512-434-HELP

CGCDROM INSTALLATION INSTRUCTIONS

Windows 95
Place the CD disc in your CD-ROM drive. The disc will autoplay. If it fails to do so, right click on your CD-ROM icon (located in "My Computer") and select OPEN. Double-click the "Install" icon.

Windows 3.1
Place the CD in your CD-ROM drive and choose File, Run from the Program Manager. Type "D:\INSTALL," where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive, and press ENTER. Follow the instructions on screen. After installation is complete, double-click the created icon to start.

Still having problems? Send a description of the problem along with your system configuration to cgcdtech@cdmag.com or mail a letter with the same information to the address below. If you have a defective CD-ROM, a replacement can be obtained by sending the original CD to

Computer Games
2 Millet St
Richmond, VT 05477
ATTN. CD replacement

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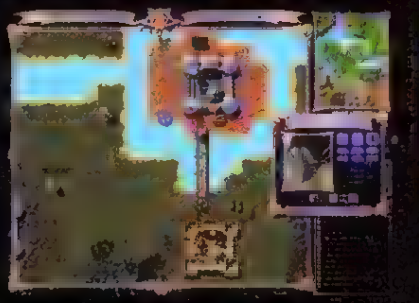
Go there. It is your last hope to conquer the truly wicked. www.warlords3.com

A pall of unspeakable evil, merciless slaughter and unbridled destruction has fallen across the Realm of Etheria. The servants of evil, the Darklords, spread like a contagion across the land. Will you be able to stop their unholy juggernaut?



Welcome to *Darklords Rising*, the greatly anticipated sequel to *Warlords III: Reign of Heroes*, 1997's turn-based strategy game of the year.

The sequel to 1997's Turn-Based Strategy Game of the Year

Discover the bigger, deeper, darker universe of *Darklords Rising*:

- 4 entirely new campaigns and 15 new scenarios
- 30 new army types for a total of 112
- 5 new uniquely skilled heroes for a total of 15
- 9 new multiplayer games including Capture the Flag, Fortress and North vs. South
- More challenging, adaptable and aggressive AI
- Fully functional map, item and campaign editor
- Bonus: Includes original campaign and scenarios from *Warlords III: Reign of Heroes*

In short, more adventure, deeper gameplay and fewer chances for survival.

WARLORDS III
DARKLORDS RISING

REDORB

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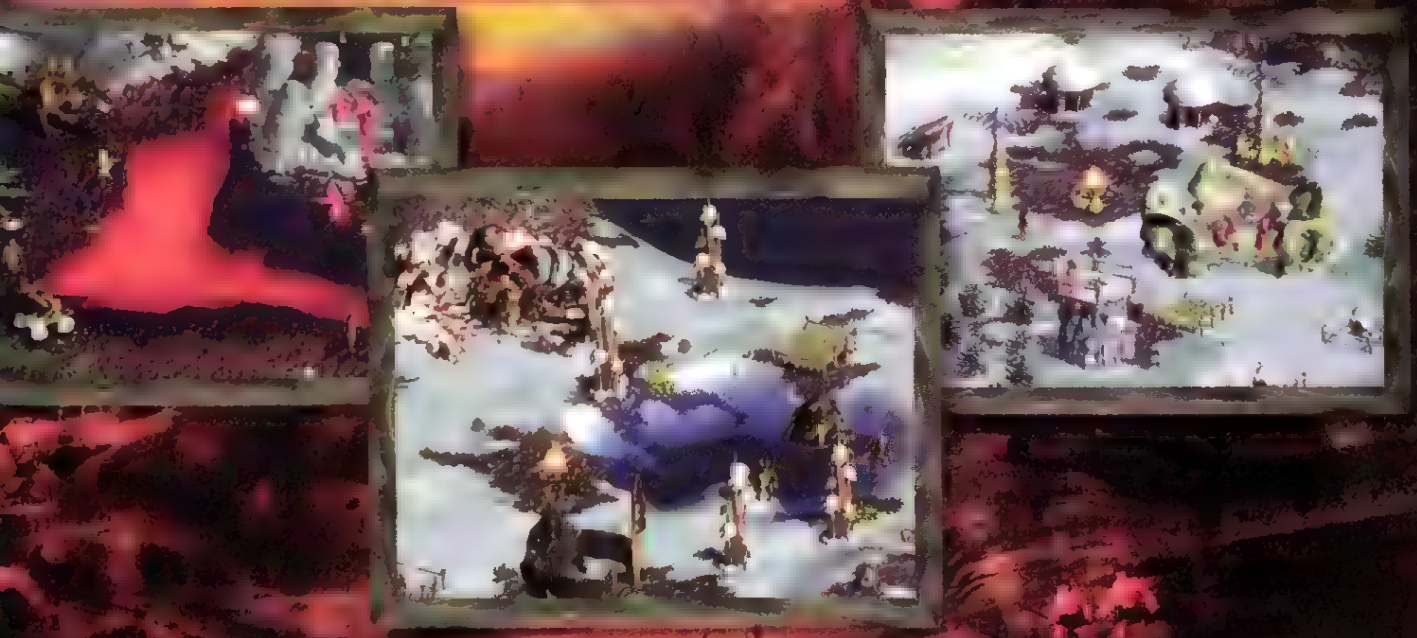

Real-Time Strategy 50,000 B.C.

DAWN OF WAR

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A.I. BEGINS.

YOU ARE HERE

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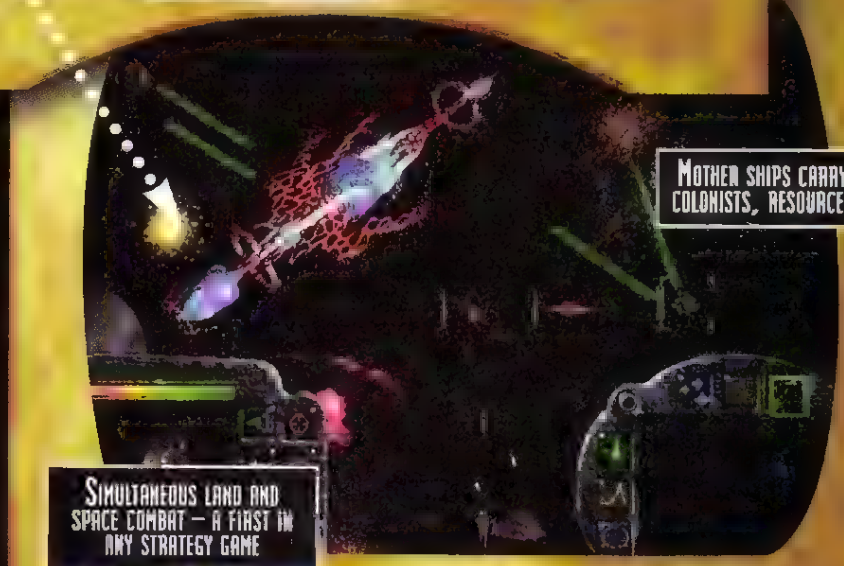

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"A.I. HAS ALL THE TOOLS TO BE THE EPIC SPACE CONQUEST GAME THAT HARD CORE FANS OF THE GENRE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR."
– GAMING NEXUS

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THINK YOU'RE UP TO IT? CAN YOU REPOPULATE YOUR ANNIHILATED RACE, RESEARCH THE TECHNOLOGIES, EXPLORE MULTIPLE UNIVERSES, AND DEFEND YOUR SPACE COLONY FROM MARAUDING ALIEN RACES – ON LAND AND SPACE SIMULTANEOUSLY?

A.I. ALIEN INTELLIGENCE WILL CHALLENGE YOU IN THE LARGEST IN-DEPTH STRATEGY GAME THE UNIVERSE HAS EVER SEEN. BEGIN YOUR CONQUEST TODAY.

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Monster Truck Madness 2

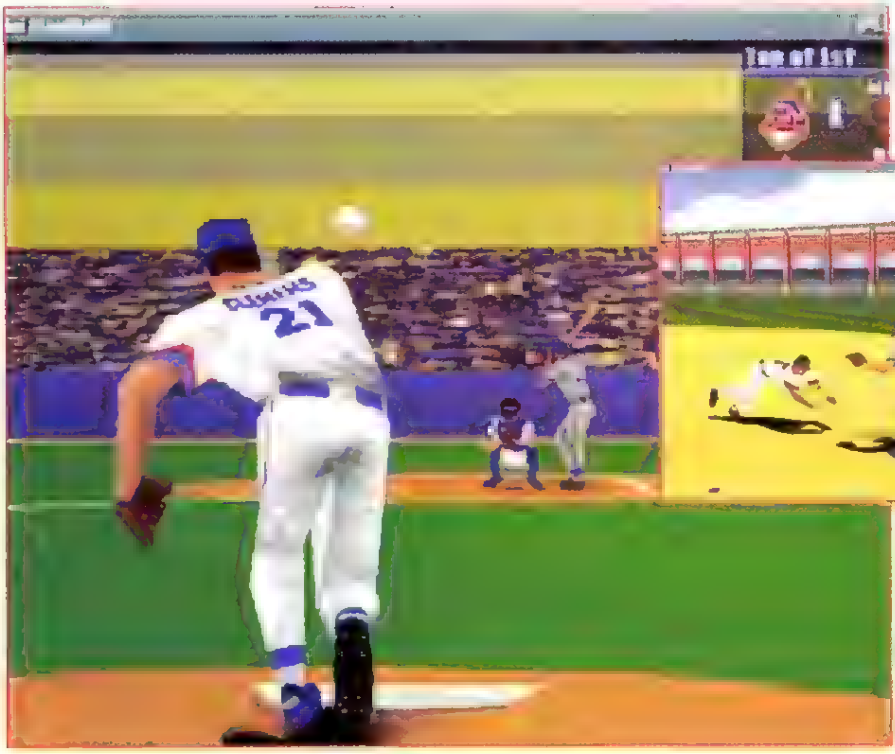
REQUIREMENTS
Windows 95,133MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM
Microsoft • www.microsoft.com

Microsoft is following up on their successful Monster Truck title, with *Monster Truck Madness 2*. They've updated the 3D graphics, included more tracks, more trucks, and added different weather conditions. The full version of *Monster Truck Madness 2* also includes all of your favorite trucks from the original. This demo includes four trucks and one track.

Warlords III: Darklords Rising

REQUIREMENTS
Windows 95, 75MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM
Red Orb Entertainment • www.redorb.com

Warlords has been one of the great turn-based fantasy strategy series ever. Now Red Orb Entertainment is releasing their expansion pack *Warlords III: Darklords Rising*. This add-on includes 4 new campaigns, a full map, item, and terrain editor with 15 new spells, and 30 new units. This demo includes one scenario called Orc Attack.



Hardball 6

The *Hardball* series has been around for quite some time, and now Accolade is hoping to breathe some new life into it. Some of the improvements come in the form of a totally new 3D game engine, and for the first time, MLB and MLBPA licenses With the ability to track stats throughout a players career, and play consecutive seasons with a draft *Hardball 6* is pulling out all the stops to vie for the top baseball sim spot.

REQUIREMENTS

Windows 95, 120Mhz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 3D accelerator for full 3D
Accolade • www.accolade.com
Technical Support: 408-296-8400

Incubation: The Wilderness

Incubation: The Wilderness is an add-on pack, for Blue Byte's tactical strategy game *Incubation: Time is Running Out*.

Windows 95, 90 MHz Pentium,16 MB RAM
Blue Byte • www.bluebyte.com

Liberation Day

In this turn-based tactical and resource management game, go toe-to-toe with three different alien races.

Windows 95, Pentium Processor, 16MB RAM
Interactive Magic • www.imagicgames.com
Technical Support: 919-461-0948

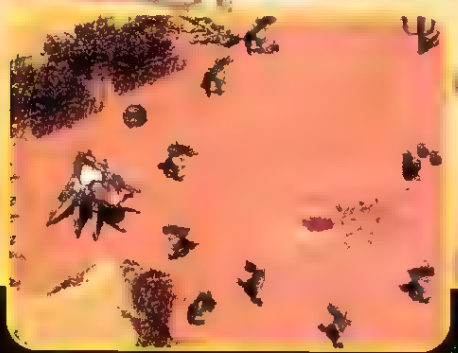
Flying Saucer

It's time to save to world, again. The demo includes little bits of each facet of this action title.

Windows 95, 100Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
PostLinear • www.postlinear.com

Incubation: The Wilderness
Liberation Day
Flying Saucer
Formula 1 Championship Edition
Comanche Gold

TRIBAL RAGE



Trailer Trash Grannies pound a Cyborg six-legger!

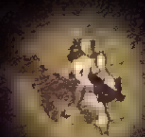
Create your own warriors, vehicles, and battlefields!

Amazon Dactyl-Riders strafe a Cyborg base camp!

Just one of the many warriors available from each tribe!

Enforcers:
Upholding the law...
a law unto themselves!

Bikers:
Born to ride...
best get outta' the way!



Amazons:
Stunningly gorgeous...
absolutely deadly!

Cyborgs:
Only 50% organic...
100% killing machines!

Death Cultist:
One foot in the grave,
finger on the trigger!

Trailer Trash:
Live wild an' die hard,
Shotguns fully loaded!

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And if you had any real talent, you'd take one of your inventions out for a spin against a friend and bust his real-time ass.

Look, you've logged countless sleepless hours playing traditional strategy games. It's time to take it up a notch.

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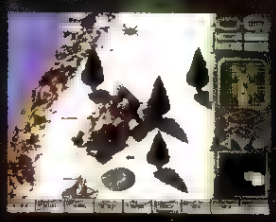
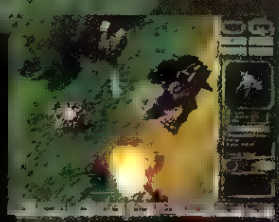
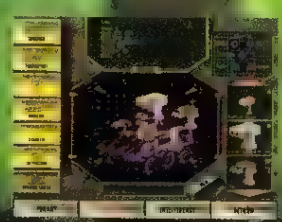
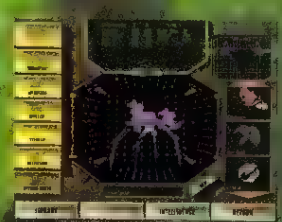

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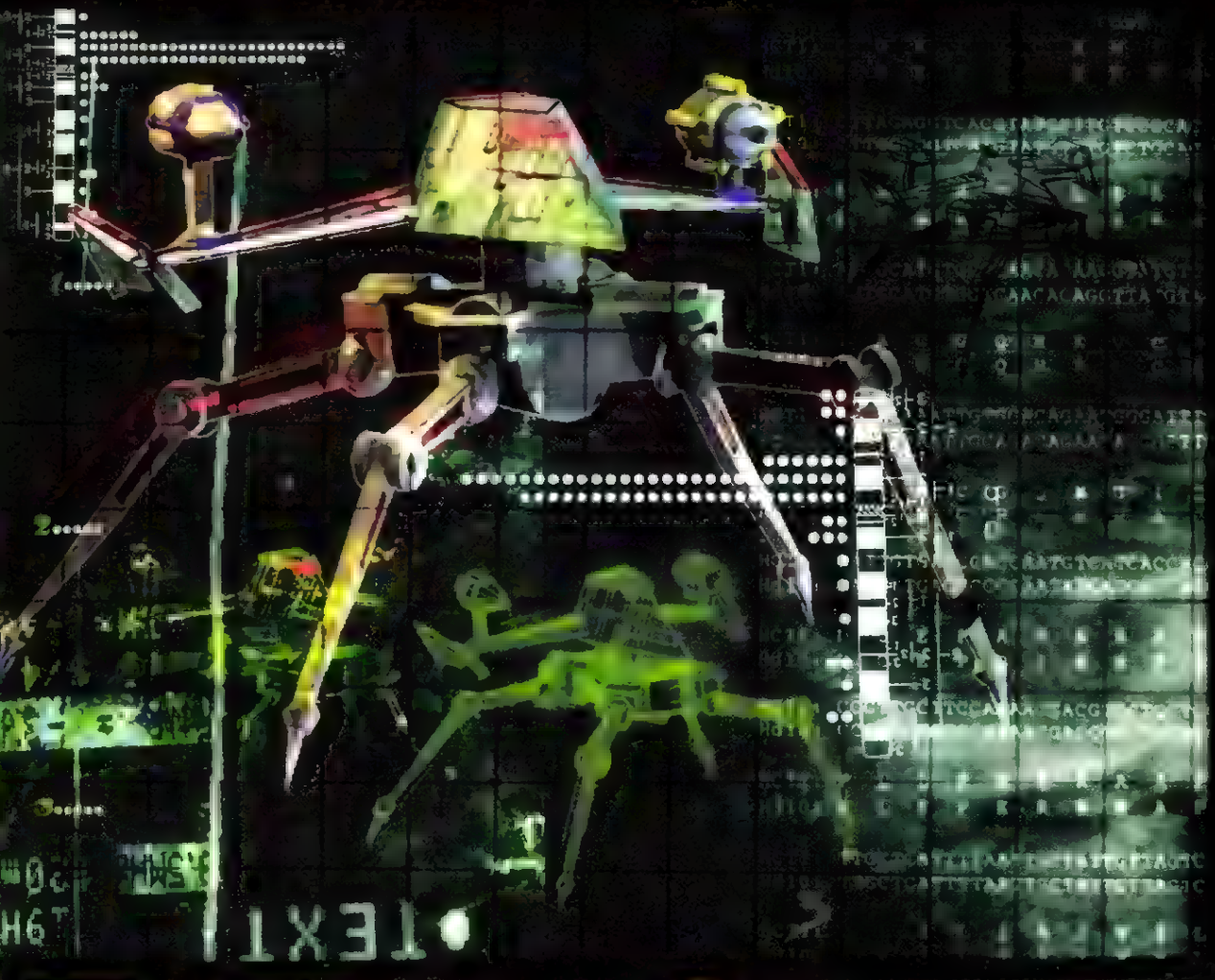
YOURSELF to blame.



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www.extreme-tactics.com

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Formula 1 Championship Edition

This is a fast paced arcade racer from Psygnosis with an official FIA/FOCA license.

Windows 95, 133Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM, Direct3D accelerator
Psygnosis • www.psygnosis.com
Technical Support: 650-655-5683

Esoteria

A third person action title form Bandai. This is the prequel demo.

Windows 95, 133Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
Bandai Digital Entertainment • www.bdec.com

Comanche Gold

This is a demo of the new enhanced version of *Comanche 3*, a helicopter arcade/sim hybrid.

Windows 95, 133Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
NovaLogic • www.novalogic.com

Bass Masters Classic: Tournament Edition

Play on actual competition lakes in this 3D bass fishing simulation.

THQ • www.thq.com

Barrage

This is a fast paced action shooter that's a great showcase for 3Dfx cards.

Windows 95, 133Mhz Pentium, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx video card
Mango Grits • www.mangogrits.com

Warbirds 2

Warbirds 2 is an online WW II Flight simulator. You can practice against computer drones offline.

Windows 95, 90Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
Interactive Magic • www.imagicgames.com
Technical Support: 919-461 0948

Jazz Jackrabbit 2

This is a platform sequel from Epic Megagames. This time you can play as Jazz, or his red haired brother Spazz.

Windows 95, 90Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
Epic Megagames • www.epicgames.com

Flight Simulator Action Scenery

Flight Simulator Action Scenery allows you to insert moving vehicles and objects into your Microsoft Flight Simulator environments.

Microsoft Flight-Simulator '95 or '98
Abacus Software • www.abacuspub.com

Front Page Sports: Trophy Rivers

This is another title in Sierra's popular fishing series, but this time the surf is rivers.

Windows 3.1/Win 95, 60Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
Sierra • www.sierra.com
Technical Support: 425-644-4343

Emergency

You must command emergency personnel in real-time, in an attempt to save lives in this 3 level demo.

Windows 95, 90Mhz Pentium, 16MB RAM
TopWare • www.topware.com

Abyss of Pandemonium

An add-on pack for *Quake*, the full version of *Abyss of Pandemonium* includes 16 new levels, six new monsters, and much more.

Quake
Instant Access • www.instantaccess.com

CENTURION

This fruit basket looks absolutely delicious! It's awfully nice of you to have me deliver it to your arch rival. I thought you hated each other?

I wonder if anyone would notice an apple missing...?

PIG FARMER

Gotta wash the stench of horse manure out of my clothes in time for church! There will be a lot of single ladies at Venus' temple tonight. Rumor has it the priest is going to denounce birth control!

I'm being transferred
slums for riot control – th
tipped me a gold piece
some fresh meat for his

PRIEST

Dedicating the temple to Venus was a smart move. Church attendance hasn't been this high in years! Then again, neither has the city's population.

©1998 Sierra

TEN TO YOUR PEOPLE!

LION TAMER
Tipping the vigil off to arrest plebs for loitering was ingenious! It's much cheaper to feed my lions prisoners than the meat from that farmer. We'll see how long those gladiators last against my boys now!
VIGIL
back to the
e Lion Tamer
to round up
ets.
TAX COLLECTOR
If you are planning to build a new Colosseum as I suspect, you'll need a lot more money, and a lot more guys like me to gather it. People who think taking candy from a baby is wrong just haven't bothered to try it.

- Build, rule and battle on one screen–no more switching between city, province and battle screens!
- Visual feedback: The real-time effects of the player's actions are immediately visible on screen.
- Various terrain sets include deserts, forests, mountains and multiple elevations.
- Construct temples to various gods of the Roman Pantheon and witness the effects on your city.
- More progressive career structure and intuitive interface mean more exciting, longer lasting gameplay.

CAESAR III

Build a Better Rome

www.sierrastudios.com

SIERRA STUDIOS

Impressions

EVERYONE E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Things to do Today

I. Round up prisoners for the lion pits.

II. Visit Forum to assess city's finances.

III. Practice waving to the people (in adoring fashion).

IV. Hire voice coach to help practice evil laughter.

V. Meet with chief architect/artisans to discuss new colosseum.

VI. Send rival a basket of poisoned fruit.

VII. Inspect gladiators for this Thursday's bloodfest at the Colosseum.

VIII. Raise taxes to fund more tax collectors.

IX. Lecture public on benefits of procreating.

X. Hire more vigils to patrol the slums.

XI. Meet Cleopatra for dinner (this might be the night!)

XII. Stage a funny thing to happen on the way to the Forum.

XIII. Absolutely don't forget to...

A Blizzard of activity

A flurry of lawsuits and a canceled game for StarCraft creators

The folks at Blizzard Entertainment may have been looking for some well deserved downtime after months of exhausting development on *StarCraft*. However, shortly after the game shipped, Blizzard stumbled into a fierce controversy over online privacy, filed a lawsuit against the publisher of an unauthorized *StarCraft* add-on pack, and made a decision to kill its *WarCraft* adventure game.

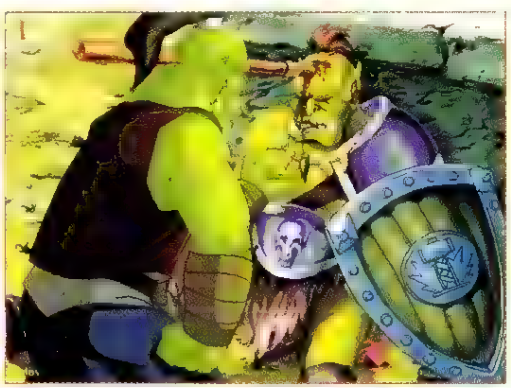
In order to combat piracy, Blizzard instituted a CD-KEY system for *StarCraft*. Attached to each *StarCraft* jewel case is a unique key code. Players only type in that CD-KEY when they install the program on their computer. When the player logs on to battle.net, Blizzard's computers check the CD-KEY and mark it as a legitimate key. However, when Blizzard began receiving complaints from players who could not log onto the service, the company began gathering the names and e-mail addresses from those having trouble logging on. Blizzard did this without those players' knowledge by obtaining the information from their Windows registry file.

With the information, Blizzard was able to determine that some problems were caused when a player purchased the game, burned a copy of the CD-ROM, wrote down the CD-KEY, and then returned the game. If the store proceeded to sell the same re-shrinkwrapped copy of the game to another consumer, that player would not be able to play on battle.net due to the original owner using a pirated CD-KEY. Blizzard addressed the problem by telling retailers not to resell returned games and instead instructed them to return opened games to the warehouse.

The exact number of names and e-mails obtained is unknown, since Blizzard said it destroyed the data afterwards. However, Blizzard spokesperson Susan Wooley said that the actual number of computers involved was well under 100. "This only happened to a handful of people who had prob lems," she said. "Of the million boxes that were shipped out, you're talking double digits. It was a small, small, small percentage."

Blizzard maintains that it acted with good intentions and halted the practice.

However, the damage had already been done. Donald P. Driscoll, an Albany, California attorney, filed a lawsuit against Blizzard and parent company Cendant Corp. The suit, filed in behalf of an consumer rights group called Intervention, Inc., alleges that Blizzard violated sections of the California Business and Professions Code and the California Penal Code—namely, that Blizzard used a program to transmit user information without the permission of the user. Driscoll told *Computer Games Online* that they want Blizzard to remove the "trapdoor" that allowed it to collect the information. The lawsuit also asks that Blizzard offer a full refund on *StarCraft* to each customer (as restitution and "to serve as a deterrent against future similar unlawful conduct"), that a court enjoin Blizzard from using *StarCraft* to upload any information other than that necessary for the game to function, and that Blizzard create and offer an updated version of the game without the trapdoor. We'll have more on this lawsuit as it progresses.



Warcraft project receives deathblow

In an unrelated story, Blizzard filed a lawsuit against MicroStar for the unauthorized *StarCraft* add-on pack *Stellar Forces*. The suit, filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleges that MicroStar was in violation of the end user license agreement by publishing a commercial product developed with the level editor that shipped with the game. Blizzard itself is working on an expansion disk (*StarCraft: Brood Wars*) and has granted licenses to Aztec New Media and WizardWorks for third party add-ons. However, the judge hearing the case denied Blizzard's request for an immediate injunction and put all further consideration of the issue on hold until June

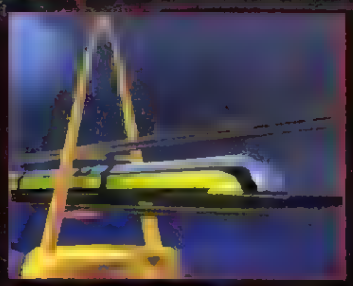
Finally, on May 22, Blizzard announced that it was halting all development on *WarCraft Adventures: Lords of the Clans*, effectively killing the project. Originally scheduled to ship last Christmas, the adventure game was delayed for a variety of technical reasons. However, Blizzard realized it had hit a sort of technological "slippery slope" and decided to stop the project.

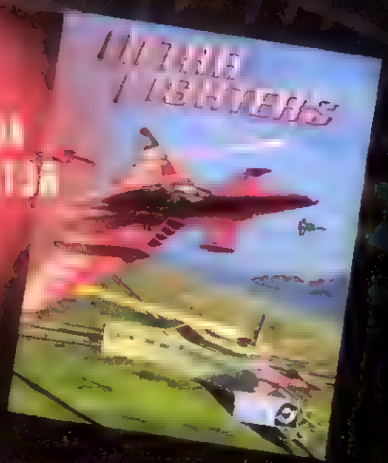
Wooley said that it was a difficult decision to kill the project, but it came down to the fact that "We felt that to make a lot of the changes that we wanted to make, the game would not get out this year. With technology changing so fast and so much, would this game meet customers expectations the next year?"

"[We] definitely don't want to release a game sometime next year and have people say, 'This would have been a great game a year ago.'" *–Jason Ocampo*

Where Technology Meets Technique

THE FUTURE OF DOGFIGHTING





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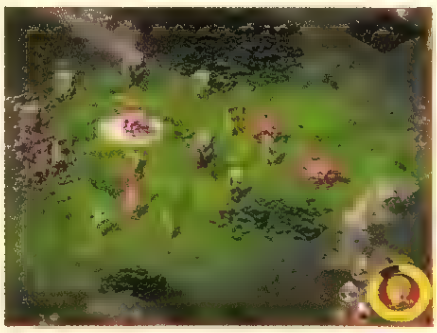
Duel: The Mage Wars

X-COM creators get medieval in an action/strategy hybrid

FIRST LOOK THEIR *X COM* SERIES may still be with MicroProse, but developer Mythos has a new game with a new publisher. The team responsible for countless nightmares about alien abductions and little green men is working on *Duel: The Mage Wars*, an action/strategy game set in a fantasy realm.

You're mucking around the citadel your eccentric uncle left you to inherit when you stumble upon one of his experiments. Being an apprentice mage, you can't help but tinker with it. Next thing you know, you're thrown into an alternate reality, armed only with a book of magic. Being alone and with no help in sight, you do what any self-respecting sorcerer would do in this situation: you make your own friends. You'll have more than 21 creatures to summon, from the fairly mundane-sounding Black Dogs to the fantastical Griffins and Phoenixes



The game runs in 800x600 resolution and takes advantage of that added area to display more of the map

Now why do you need an army of creatures? To overthrow the Wizard overlords, of course. The struggle will rage over three realms (Celtic, Greek, and Medieval) and you'll use a mixture of spells and creatures in this war. All spells cast will affect the universal balance—use one spell type too much and the world will change to reflect that.

Diablo meets X-COM

The game will have multiplayer support for up to 36 players as well as pseudo-random maps, which means that no two games will play out the same way. If Mythos is as successful with *Duel* as it was with *X-COM*, the next nightmares gamers have may be about Trolls and not Sectoids. *Jason Ocampo*

Duel: The Mage Wars • Virgin • Windows 95

BRIEFS: Where do you want to go next year?—Microsoft is jokingly known for two things: its quest for world domination and its slippery release schedules. So it's somewhat ironic that the company announced that *Age of Empires II*, the sequel to its popular world conquest game, has been delayed. Originally scheduled for a release later this year, it's now looking at a spring 1999 ship date bumped back from the fall of 1998... **Sierra brands itself, but did it hurt?**—Sierra On-Line unveiled the details behind its new branding strategy which seeks to streamline its myriad product line under recognizable brand names. Sierra Attractions will handle the casual gaming line, including Berkeley Systems' *You Don't Know Jack*

MiG Alley

Flying and fighting during the dawn of the jet age

FIRST LOOK "MIG ALLEY"—THAT infamous corridor of airspace in North Korea where jet-to-jet combat came of age during the Korean War. Despite that significance, few flight sims have covered it, starting with the arcade-like *MiG Alley Ace* of the eight bit days to the recent but still (arguably) arcade-leaning *Sabre Ace*. Developer Rowan, however, plans on going whole-hog into it with their upcoming *MiG Alley*

While the gameplay covers the entire war, it focuses on the Chinese Spring Offensive of 1951. Earlier periods (the initial invasion, the defense of Pusan, etc.) will be covered with scenarios and mini-campaigns that double as training for the main event, while the later, largely static, part of the war will probably be covered in individual scenarios. While early in the game you may be concerned with just your plane, or your unit, by the time you get to the main campaign you'll be the Supreme Air Commander, in charge of directing all the UN air power on the peninsula

Note the cockpit canopy reflections, which Rowan hopes to make dynamic; more than just eye candy, they are important for situational awareness (they can help you orient yourself when looking out the cockpit)

In single player mode you'll fly for the UN only, taking off in either the F-51D Mustang, the F-80C Shooting Star, the F-84E Thunder Jet, or one of three F-86 Sabre variants (A, E, or F)—which craft you fly in will depend on the time period and the missions involved Multiplayer will add flyable MiG 15 and MiG 15bis aircraft, and there will be over a dozen other aircraft represented (in addition to a variety of ground targets)

A slashing head-on attack

With loads of historical research already conducted (Rowan's even gotten its hands on a then-classified report comparing F-86 and MiG-15 air combat tactics), the team is working strenuously on getting their modeling right. We'll be seeing how they do when we take to the skies with the game late this year. *–Scott Udell*

MiG Alley • Empire Interactive • Windows 95

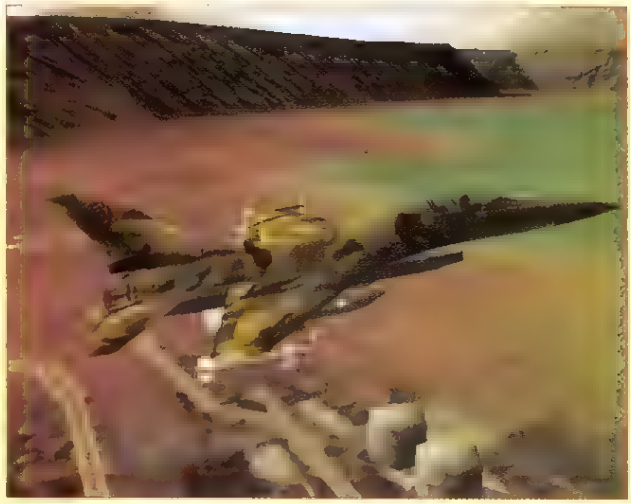
F-16 Aggressor

Virgin's Falcon simulation takes flight

FIRST LOOK AFTER THE SLEW OF F-22 sims in 1997, perhaps 1998 will mark a return to the F-16 days of yore. MicroProse's *Falcon 4.0* won't be the only simulation of that popular plane—NovaLogic is doing *F-16 Viper* and Virgin is prepping a Falcon of its own with *F-16 Aggressor*.

Virgin claims that *Aggressor*, developed by General Simulations Inc. (who are also working on Psygnosis' *Wings of Destiny*) and first demonstrated publicly at last year's ECTS show in London, will field one of the most advanced flight models anywhere. The company says that the flight model engine was developed over seven years and has been used by the USAF and defense contractors. More importantly, it will reportedly include a complete model of the F-16's fly-by-wire flight control system, which gives the plane some of its agility as well as the nickname, the "electric jet."

Getting aggressive with a battleship. Glub glub



Flying low in the 3Dfx version of the game

Aggressor won't be about the Air Force squadron which role-plays the enemy during wargames (the squadron is aptly named Aggressor). Rather, it takes a *Strike Commander* sort of turn. Players are mercenary pilots who've been hired to take out anti-government rebels all across the continent of Africa. There will be 40 missions across four campaigns ranging from bombing raids to close air support. The enemy won't be restricted to former Soviet hardware, as they'll take to the air in F 15s as well as Su-27s

While specific details about 3D support and multiplayer aren't available (though one of these screenshots is from a 3Dfx version of the game), Virgin says that *Aggressor* will handle a wide variety of graphics cards, resolutions, and color depths. *–Jason Ocampo*

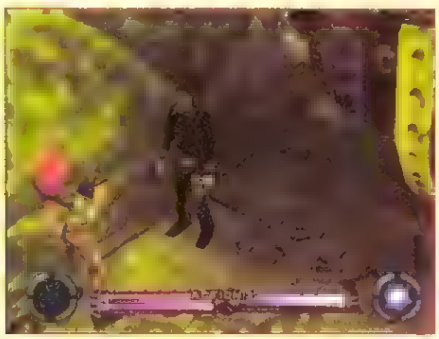
F-16 Aggressor • Virgin • Windows 95

trivia games and the perennial *Hoyle* card series. Sierra FX consists of the company's Yosemite Entertainment division. Expect a wide range of games, from a *Babylon 5* space combat title to *Middle Earth*, a massively multiplayer role-playing game set in J.R.R. Tolkien's beloved world. Sierra Home will handle home productivity software. Sierra Sports has all the company's sports games (duh), including *NASCAR Racing 3* and *Football Pro 99*. Sierra Studios will tackle everything form action (*Half-Life*) to strategy (*Caesar III*). And Dynamix will continue to develop simulations and action games... **A Righteous acquisition**—Diamond Multimedia announced it will acquire Micronics Computers, whose Orchid brand manufactures the

O.D.T.

Hey, Verne! It's a French action game

FIRST LOOK *O.D.T.* IS A THIRD-PERSON shooter from a group at Psygnosis' Paris Studios called FDI. FDI stands for Frogs Did It and *O.D.T.* stands for "Or Die Trying," as in "Escape from the tower on which your airship has crash land or die trying." The developers also confess that *O.D.T.* sounds like a Frenchman trying to say "oddity," an apt description of the game's environments and monsters. The 75 levels, divided into eight sectors, look like they were ripped from the pages of Jules Verne, it's no coincidence that some of the folks responsible for the haunting *City of Lost Children* are also behind this title. *O.D.T.* has a dark industrial/fantasy setting, characterized by 19th century retro-tech. Most of the game takes place in the tower's interior, in settings like the kitchen, the garden, the jail, and the roof. A particle system creates convincing rain effects and detailed environments allow for subtle effects like plants blowing in the wind.



Is that a sextant in your hand or are you just happy to see me?

The influence of some of the developers of *Adidas Power Soccer* is also clear in the motion captured characters. Rather than using the slightly weird marionette style of games like *Quake* and *Tomb Raider*, *O.D.T.* uses a fluid motion capture scheme to animate the action. Characters have special moves like side-rolls that spice up the standard running and gunning. *O.D.T.* also has some role-playing elements: you choose one of the game's four characters, each with a rating for constitution, spirit, and weapon control, all of which can be improved as you play. There are magic spells as well as four different types of weapons for each character.

The bigger they are...the harder they fall

O.D.T. will include multiplayer support for four players in either classic deathmatch style or in an interesting capture the flag variant called Capture the Pearl. In these games, you'll have to gather other players' pearls to build a tower while defending your own pearl. *–Tom Chick*

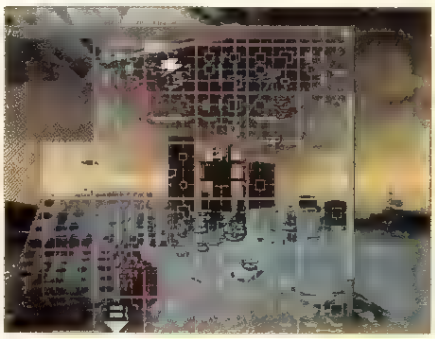
O.D.T. • Psygnosis • Windows 95

Urban Assault

Microsoft gets gritty and futuristic

FIRST LOOK IT APPEARS THAT THE next generation in 3D gaming may involve real-time strategy. How else to explain the sudden upsurge in this intriguing hybrid? First we had *Uprising*, followed by *Battlezone*, and now Microsoft's entry, *Urban Assault*

Played from a first-person perspective *à la* every other 3D action game, you control 15 types of combat vehicles *à la* every real-time strategy game. A lot of the difficulty in these games comes from their interfaces, and the team behind *Urban Assault* hopes to solve this problem by using an overhead transparent pop-up map that allows you to coordinate the mayhem while simultaneously keeping your own vehicle out of harm's way. But it doesn't stop there—you can also personally take over any of the various tanks, helicopters, jets, jeeps, bombers and satellites in order to give your opponent a little extra pow



The map pops up over the 3D view

The game has an interesting grungy appearance

Typical real time strategy features include resource management and technology upgrades. You can also use their "squadron manager" to in effect "program" levels of aggressiveness in the field. Over 30 levels take place in various landscapes that are littered with over 100 destructible building types. 3D card support and network play round out the features

While early builds of the game are too rough to give a good indication if they'll pull this off, the German team working on this game does have one huge advantage—*Uprising* and *BattleZone* are already out, and if there's one thing Microsoft does well, it's learn from others. *–Steve Bauman*

Urban Assault • Microsoft • Windows 95, NT

Righteous and the Righteous II line of Voodoo- and Voodoo2-based accelerators. The deal, worth approximately $31.6 million, was approved by the boards of directors for both companies. This doesn't mean that the Orchid Righteous family will disappear. Diamond said it intends to continue the Orchid Righteous 3D brand and that it will coordinate the marketing of the Righteous 3D and its own Monster 3D brands to their respective markets worldwide. The deal also means that Diamond will acquire Micronics' existing motherboard business. Micronics made its name building motherboards, and Diamond plans on using its worldwide infrastructure to leverage the motherboard business. Diamond also plans on entering

Fighter Legends

Jane's new series takes a trip to Europe in 1944

FIRST LOOK FROM THE TEAM responsible for popular sims such as *US Navy Fighters* and *ATF* comes a new series, dubbed *Fighter Legends*. The first edition of the franchise is *Europe 1944*, a World War II combat simulation.

As with the past efforts of this group from Jane's Combat Simulations, the game will likely have a less steep learning curve than a *Longbow 2* or *F-15*. However, they're still claiming that their flight models will be accurate and take into account battle damage and weight shifts based on fuel and weapons loads. The flyable planes include the ubiquitous P-51D Mustang, P-47D Thunderbolt, P-38J Lightning, Spitfire MK IX, Messerchmitt BF 109G6 and ME 262 and the Focke-Wulf FW 190A8 Each will have a unique 3D virtual cockpit with working instruments.

An FW 190 gets nailed

A beautiful shot of the Spitfire

The team plans on answering some of the criticisms leveled at their previous simulators, and this one will be powered by an all new 3D engine. The visuals will support 3D accelerators out of the box, so the game may actually run with full detail on the average machine. Speed demons will be happy to know that they're also supporting future technology, including screen resolutions and high-polygon count objects for next-generation hardware.

The campaigns won't be dynamic, but will have branching missions that take place during the Battle of the Bulge. Players can fly either side—solo or multiplayer—via a LAN or the Internet, with the ability to hop in and out of the games. The game will be released this Fall. *–Steve Bauman*

Fighter Legends: Europe 1944 • Jane's Combat Simulations • Windows 95

Luftwaffe Commander

Come along on a pilot's career path to Hell

FIRST LOOK SSI'S OFTEN HANDLED World War II gaming in an interesting fashion. Some of their most popular games have taken a primarily German perspective, following the path of the losing side in the war... well, okay—in *Panzer General* you could turn the historical tables. In their sims, however, history is adhered to; your goal in them isn't to win the war, but to survive it.

Following in the footsteps of their tank sim *Panzer Commander*, *Luftwaffe Commander* lets you trace the career of a German fighter pilot from the time of German participation in the Spanish Civil War through to the defense of Berlin in the waning days of World War II. While you'll primarily fly that work-horse of the Luftwaffe, the Me-109, you might also experience other flyable planes, including the He-72 trainer and Me-262 jet—in all, there will be 10 flyable planes and 58 planes in all.

Flying the He-51 early in your career

The game will include 50 or more pre-made single player missions and a "Custom Combat" option for continued play. Career-mode combat (single player only) will span five combat areas, each with some 50,000 square miles of terrain: Spain, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Germany. Multiplay will be represented in some 20 special scenarios for up to 10 players, and will be supported via modem, direct connect, LAN, or the Internet. No matter what form of game you choose, you'll be able to fly with a simplified flight model (called "Iron Cross") or a hard-core, accurate one called "Knight's Cross" mode. *–Scott Udell*

SSI says the game will have 10 flyable aircraft with "detailed interiors and instrument panels" for each

Luftwaffe Commander • SSI • Windows 95

the sub-$1,000 PC market by developing a motherboard with integrated multimedia systems. Such a board could also be used in the emerging set-top and media center markets... **King of the 3D World?**—3Dfx Interactive shipped its four millionth Voodoo chipset, which prompted 3Dfx president and CEO Greg Ballard to proclaim, "The 3Dfx Interactive platform has become the new standard for 3D PC game development." The four million figure includes all Voodoo, Voodoo Rush, and Voodoo2 chipsets shipped to date... **Lincroft Forms Ansible**—Peter Lincroft has left *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* developer Totally Games and founded a new development company known as Ansible Software. Located in Berkeley, Calif., Ansible's first project is

Omikron

Please, may I inhabit your body?

FIRST LOOK THERE SEEM TO BE more software development houses than wineries in France these days. Quantic Dream is a part of the Gallic assault on gamers' wallets, in this case with the action/adventure *Omikron*, to be published by Eidos. Like Eidos' own *Tomb Raider*, *Omikron* will feature prodigious 3D...environments, with, it is claimed, a larger play area and faster graphics. Eidos boasts that the game will have the story depth of a traditional adventure game, the longevity and exploration of *Tomb Raider*, and multiple RPG elements as well.

Ooo la la...but she'll never match Lara

The plot centers around the domed (or is that doomed?) city of, you guessed it, Omikron. Seems some awful blast from the past wants to suck the souls out of all the inhabitants (sort of like disco). After heeding a call for help, players will, naturally, help the good citizens of Omikron resist the evil with all the 3D action/adventure tricks they can think of (and a good dose of the Sex Pistols, maybe?). The struggle will be deadly, of course, but hey, death is no biggie. *Omikron* features Virtual Reincarnation; you get to take over the body of the next character to touch your corpse. Eeeeew. And there's more. Facial expressions are, according to Eidos, motion-captured in real-time (how else can you capture motion?), as are the martial-arts moves players can perform; these latter were captured from the moves of real, live martial arts champions. Toss in a living city environment, and Direct3D support as well as optimized software rendering, and you have a half-action, half-adventure hybrid which will no doubt simply ooze with French flair. When can we expect it? Check the stores sometime around Christmas, *je crois*. *-Robert Mayer*

Nice rendering, but it looks like a refugee from *Riven*...

Omikron • Eidos Interactive • www.eidos.com

World Air Power

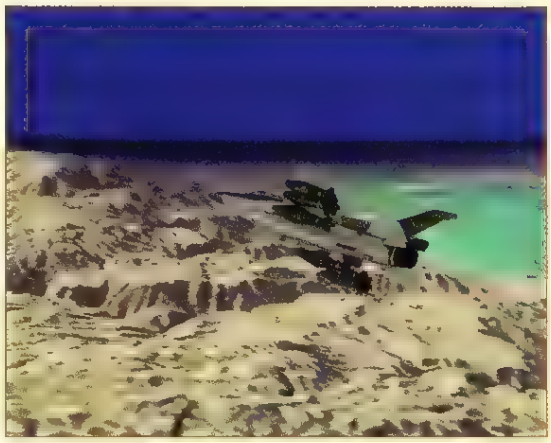
Jane's is recruiting simmers for the Israeli Air Force

FIRST LOOK DEVELOPED BY PIXEL Multimedia, a group of ex-Israeli fighter pilots based in Israel, the latest series from the San Mateo Jane's group also responsible for *Fighter Legends* is the first simulator to model one of the world's top air forces, the IAF.

The game will take place in the Middle East (duh) and will feature six campaigns (that include 42 historical and hypothetical missions) and an instant action mode. Multiplayer support will be included out of the box, and all of the missions and campaigns can be flown either solo or with friends

The flyable planes include a mix of US and Israeli planes, including the good old F-4, the F-4 2000 (the '90s version), the ubiquitous F 15 and F 16, Israel's own Lavi (Israel's next-generation fighter), Kfir (a dual-role single-seater plane), and the French Mirage III, the plane with the most victories in the IAF.

The cockpit of the F4 2000



This shot of an F-16 in flight shows off the impressive terrain

The IAF is known for low-altitude dogfighting through the valleys and canyons of the region, so it's crucial the team is able to generate a quality terrain engine that can handle relief. Based solely on the screenshots, they seem to have met the challenge, though it remains to be seen what sort of machine it will require to run it at a decent frame rate. Helping the game a bit will be full support for current and next-generation 3D hardware, Voodoo 2, AGP, etc.

You too can join the IAF this Fall. *-Steve Bauman*

World Air Power: Israeli Air Force • Jane's Combat Simulations • Windows 95

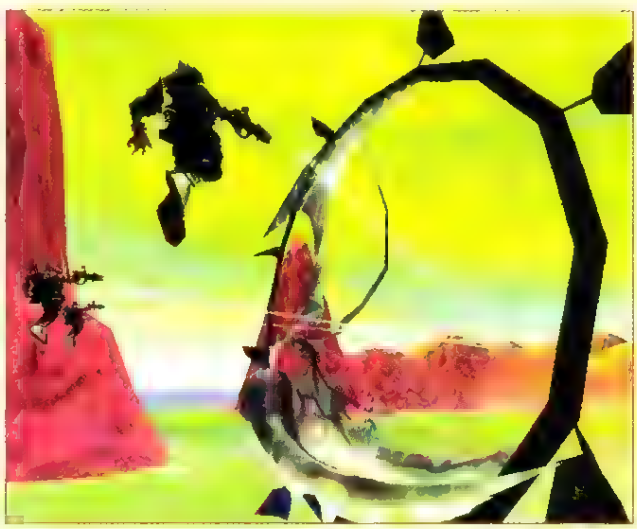
is an action/simulation game scheduled for release late next year. Lincroft was a senior programmer at Totally Games, and a veteran of the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* projects... **Shiny, Happy Klingons**—Veteran actors Christopher Plummer and David Warner will reprise their Star Trek VI roles in Interplay's upcoming space combat simulator *Star Trek: Klingon Academy*. Plummer, a two-time Tony Award winner, is probably best known for his role in movie version of *The Sound of Music*. He will reprise his role as General Chang, the Klingon commander with an affinity for Shakespeare. Warner will appear as Chancellor Gorkon. It's safe to assume the events of the game will precede those of the movie, in which both characters were killed... ■

Citizen Kabuto

Really big off-beat 3D fun

FIRST LOOK A MULTIPLAYER 3D action game, *Citizen Kabuto* is the first release from Planet Moon Studios, the principles of which were involved in the creation of *MDK*. While the name is a bit mysterious, we do know the game puts players in the shoes (fins? tentacles?) of the Sea Reapers, a race of folks blessed with an Eden-like paradise in the center of their cozy little nebula. Unfortunately, the Meccaryn race is a bunch of sorehead warmongers, and their violent pleasures threaten the paradise of the Sea Reapers. To protect their treasure, the Sea Reapers create Kabuto, an enormous giant (well, duh) to guard paradise. Someone forgot to tell Kabuto, though, and something goes terribly wrong before the Meccaryn even arrive.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Kabuto



The Meccaryn on the attack

The Sea Reapers, or what's left of them after Kabuto has lunch (he's easily irritated, it seems), retreat to the sea, and the arrival of the once-feared Meccaryn sets off a desperate struggle. Which of the three parties will control paradise? Will the invaders be the Sea Reapers' salvation, or just another threat? Can Kabuto find happiness as a bouncer?

Considering their previous game, you can expect some off-beat humor, compelling gameplay, and, um, some odd graphic looks no doubt. Doubly so, since the world of the Sea Reapers features magic, technology, and brute savagery in equal measure (sort of like Hollywood).

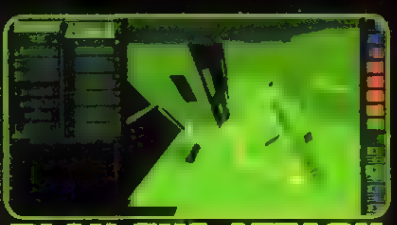
Expect this gigantic romp on the wild side to stomp into stores some time this winter. *–Robert Mayer*

Citizen Kabuto • Tantrum • Windows 95

Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX

Play as if 5.7 Billion Lives Depended on it.

The most revolutionary action/strategy game of its kind. Nothing comes close to offering such an exciting combination of strategy, team-building, realistic three-dimensional graphics and true-to-life special forces action. **ONE SHOT KILLS.** The ultimate goal is to save yourself and the world from deadly terrorists. You must successfully complete 17 unique missions, and if you die, the game isn't over: **THE WORLD IS.**



PLAN THE ATTACK

EXECUTE THE MISSION

SAVE THE WORLD

Available August 1998

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Ultima Ascension

The Avatar comes full circle

By Cindy Yans

Origin • Windows 95

After he spawned *Akalabeth* during the tender years of adolescence, 19 year old Richard Garriott, better known to some as Lord British, created *Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness* in 1982. Even though playing it nowadays is a Mo'Slo moment, in its time it revolutionized computer role-playing forever. Finally, many leaps of technology later, in strides *Ultima Ascension* in full 3D, aspiring to provide some of us with closure, and others with a new beginning.

Tonight at Caesar's Palace: Avatar vs. Guardian

Garriott returns to his primary-designer roots with this title for the first time in a long while. Almost all of Garriott's games have had a moral Since *Ultima IV,* the series' storyline has centered around one hero, the Avatar, as he strove to fill the world with virtue and rid it of all things contemptible. Origin has been playing rather close to the vest with the plot of *Ultima Ascension*. What we do know, however, is that this will be the final chapter of the Avatar Guard an conflict; it will answer ail your questions about their relationship; and it will cu minate in a revelation about who they really are in the greater scheme of things, and what they actually mean to one another. Perhaps they'll begin dating others At any rate, the moral here will be centered on self-sufficiency finding answers in oneself without relying solely on others

When the Avatar returns to Brittania after his (arcade style) journey to Pagan in *Ultima VIII*, he finds it in quite a state of disarray an understatement, really, as it is being ripped and gutted and burned by mysterious columns of energy which have begun to appear. The Guardian has already had a chance to refuel and begin wreaking havoc upon the world. He is the one who is responsible for these columns that are literally ripping the world apart, leaving a path of destruction in their wake—craters, rivers of lava, climate changes, etc.

When you start the game, there is no magic in the world The columns are acting like giant lightning rods that have absorbed all of the magic in order to power their movement. As the player progresses, he or she will deactivate the columns, one by one, hence intermittently restoring "real" magic to a land that is pretty sick and tired of being able to use only those dull potions—not to mention the bottoming out of reagent futures on the world market

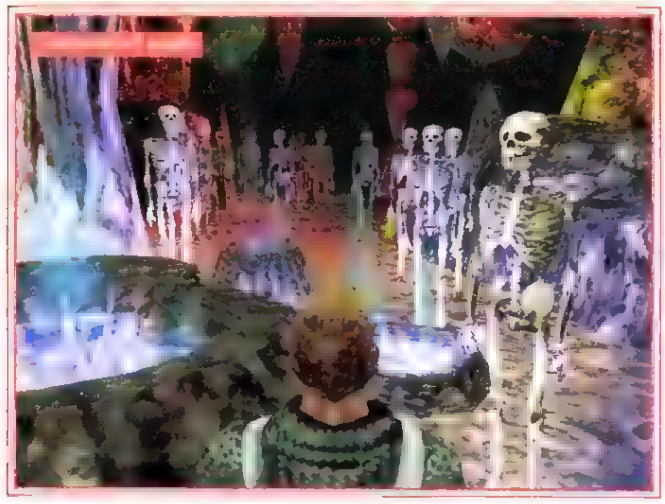
There's no party, and I'll cry if I want to

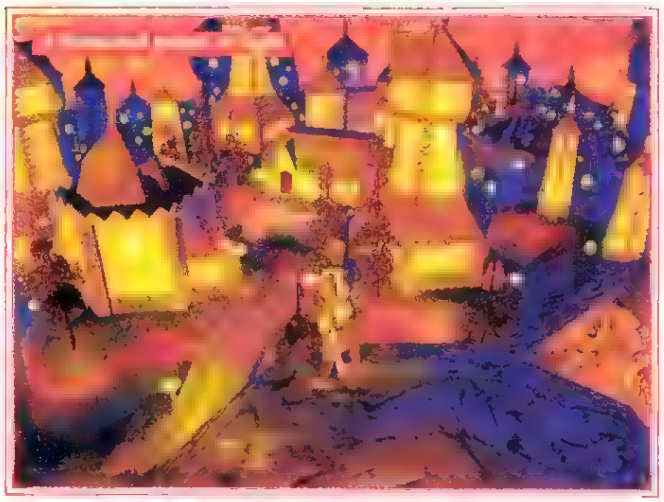
One of the largest criticisms people seem to have with this game stems from the belief that you simply can't have an RPG with a single-character system. However, the third-person 3D engine for this game has been much too resource-demanding to support a party system. During our visit the game was up and running at a slow framerate, much to the team's dismay. They claim it was previously running at 15-17FPS, and hope the final version will run at around 20FPS. The hardware can only push around so many polygons at once, and they've about reached their limit.

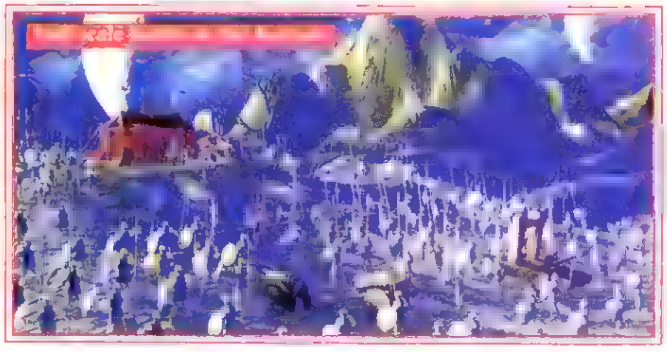
They had initially thought of keeping a party system, but were not happy with how it was working. "It didn't feel like a party," according to Producer Ed Del Castillo. "It felt like a character and a bunch of orbital satellites, like a shooter game when you pick up the power up and now you have this little node that's circling you and providing extra firepower and shooting in the direction that you're shooting in. They weren't adding anything to the gameplay—only extra fire power. If I really believed that we would have had sensational dialogue, and sensational feedback and things that made those characters really come alive instead of just being guys that follow you, I would have left them in."

Party or no party, the game will require at least a 233MHz Pentium with 32MB of RAM. They are confident that by the time the game is released, every prospective 13-year-old RPGer will have one. Heck, you're probably hoping that *you* will have one by this winter.

To compensate for the lack of the classic party, the designers have implemented a system in which you will be able to play three characters in addition to the main Avatar. You will play Shamino (no longer just another mouth to feed), Lord British and Raven, the Avatar's love interest in the game. At certain points in the plot, the Avatar's situation will







become intractable, and it will be up to one of the other three characters to see the predicament through to conclusion

In the case of Shamino (the embodiment of the Virtue of Spirituality), we have the following scenario: During the Avatar's absence, Shamino, not wanting to be too old to play racquetball when the Avatar eventual ly returned, has put himself into stasis. When the Avatar releases him, he wanders off as a free agent for the Avatar. While exploring, he finds that Britain is warring with Moonglow. Based on a miscommunication, Britain sent a ship to Moonglow which never arrived there. The Moong owians believe that Britain never sent the ship and the Britains believe that the Moonglow people simply sank the ship for sport.

Shamino's investigation uncovers a ghost ship which leads him to the original shipwreck. As a result of this discovery, he dives into a conveniently placed whirlpool and is drawn into the ruins of Ambrosia and Hythloth. Eventually, he solves the mystery of what really happened to the ship. Having this information along with other news from Valoria, the Avatar is able to deal with the warring cities The switch-over sequence will be played rather like a flashback. At a certain time, when the Avatar is conveniently located, he will see Shamino swimming to shore. Shamino will then begin to recount the adventure, and upon his entry into the whirlpool, the player will take control of the Shamino character.

Each character you play will handle the situations in a different manner. Shamino, after so long in stasis, is a rolling bundle of energy, and will take over the bulk of the very "physical" gameplay. Hythloth and Ambrosia have rather melded since we last saw them, and Ambrosia has collapsed. This provides an environment that will be conducive to the running, jumping, swimming and swinging from-vine activities. Lord British, on the other hand, is very old by this time. He will negotiate The Abyss portion of the world—a totally different environment that will be somewhat reflective of Lord British's own soul searching. Lord British has become rather abstracted over the years, and has disassociated himself from the world. This venture into The Abyss will represent his "return to Brittania." Rather like Arthur returning to battle against Mordred, British will skirmish with Blackthorn. We are promised that Lord British will be rather stodgy and will have to levitate himself from place to place.

Powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men

The game will employ three magic systems in addition to the classic magic held by all (the circle-based system we are used to). First there is the Avatar's "Ether Magic" (tentatively named for the Avatar's former title, The Titan of Ether) which is not reagent dependent, but instead elemen tally based because his magical abilities have been permanently warped from his trip to Pagan. Next there is Alchemy, which has a lot of spel effects that are all potion or projectile based.

Finally, there is ritual-based magic. Numerous quests in the game are not solvable by anything less than a ritual, which will have to be learned, and certain items need to be present in order for it to work. The items will act like "totems." As an example, releasing Shamino from his stasis is a ritual solution. You wave the racquetball three times over his head while shouting, "Hey stupid! The court's reserved for seven o'clock!" Actually, what you'll need are a bell, book and candle, which you must use in certain ways to create a one time spell

The designers have tried to make the spells unique and interesting, rather than have whole groups of spells which do essentially the same thing (in previous games, for example, Paralyze, Hold, Sleep, and Spider Web, for instance, have the same virtual effect). Here we'll certainly see offense, defense, melee offense, weapon offense, and projectile spells, but there will be things we haven't seen before

Abilities versus statistics

Although Del Castillo notes that he is a huge fan of stat based games, the philosophy here is to bring the element of growth, the exhilaration of accomplishment, to the surface without dragging players through all of that "stuff." "What's really fun about stats is the ability you get because of them," he says

Each of your weapons—projectiles, bows, staves, swords, two handed swords, impact weapons, etc.—will have its own series of attacks. nitially you have a basic stroke, but after some experience, you will gain a addi tional parry, swing, thrust or distance abilities as you progress This requires you to evaluate the monsters' particular resistance to a type of damage. For instance, a Skeleton might resist a thrust because it goes

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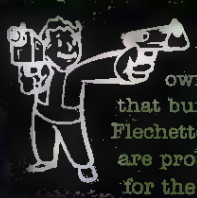

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Fall in love, get married, and then pimp your spouse for a little extra chump-change. Hey, it's a dark and dangerous world.

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right through its ribcage, whereas an overhead blow might happily smash their fragile skulls to smithereens. Of course all weapons will do some damage, so if you prefer to hack away for 400 blows when you could have smited in one, you've at least had some cardio-vascular exercise

The gameworld of gorgeousness

Even this early, one thing is certain: the world environments are absolutely spectacular. From the golden moments when evening softly turns to dusk, to the rain, fog and lightning effects, to the wonderfully evocative light-sourcing and directional sound, to an evening in Moonglow with flickering, floating lanterns, to The Asylum area, a kind of pirate's den where everything is constructed from old pirate ships —everything is beautiful. Kudos to all of the artists for a superb job of texturing and rendering. An early Behemoth animation shows an immense creature about two Avatars high, with plenty of scary teeth and a gait that actually bounces more than strides. Charming.

The Avatar character was not finished during our visit, but shows potential. They decided not to go with motion capture, because looping sequences are nearly impossible to recreate using this technique. Since physical behavior is so hard to create from scratch, they feel that they will be tweaking the Avatar's movement right down to the wire.

Dragons on fire *Ultima's biggest fans are dubious*

The Dragons are spewing flames. Newsgroup flames, that is. For the unfamiliar, the Ultima Dragons are a group of fans, a club of sorts, whose interests and affiliation are wholly connected to all things *Ultima*. They have each given themselves a Cute Dragon Name, such as Sith Dragon (a high-visibility type… find him at www.walrus.com/~sith/), Plaid Dragon, Pia Zadora Dragon and others. The six-year old group moved from Prodigy to the Internet in 1994, and many of its members are now poised, backs arched, scales bristling, awaiting the next member of Origin's long-lived long-loved series.

Alongside *Wizardry* and *Might and Magic*, the *Ultima* series has given hard-core role-players something in which to sink their teeth—at least prior to the last iteration. *Ultima VIII: Pagan* took a lot of flak from the Dragons and their ilk for its inclusion of (gasp) quite a bit of arcade-like gameplay. And now, a plethora of traffic on the Internet indicates that there are some very verbal opponents of what is happening with this latest title.

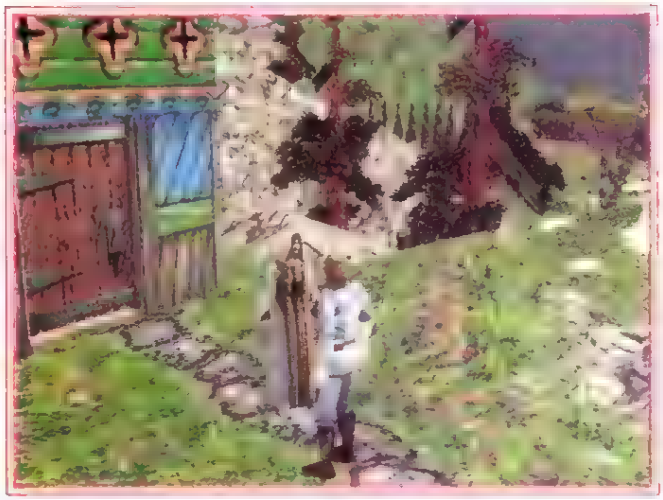
"It's not about baking bread"—or is it?

Producer Ed Del Castillo exhibits more than the requisite passion of a design-team member living, breathing, eating and sleeping for his product. To say that he is *profoundly* passionate is simply not enough. His emotional attachment to the project seems genuine, and during our visit he uttered the word "emotional" (or a form of it) 23 times before we lost count.

The designers of *Ascension* want us to recapture what we experienced emotionally during the early days of pen-and-paper RPGs and their eventual transition to the computer. They want us to remember how good accomplishments made us feel, not how good stats did. They want to remove what is mundane and replace it with the stuff that will make us feel the excitement—feel the greatness. "It's not about baking bread," Del Castillo became fond of saying. One Dragon, however, stopped him cold and said simply, "No. You don't understand. It *is* about baking bread." And this is a simple but powerful illustration of The Great Rift that has developed between the visionaries behind *Ultima Ascension* and their somewhat small but extremely verbal group of opponents.

Probably the most significant event that shows how wide this rift has become was the departure from the team of two of its key designers, Bob White and Dan Reubenfield. Reubenfield has been very verbal in his posts on the Internet with statements such as, "*Ultima IX* has lost sight of what the *Ultima* Series means to both gamers and to the industry as a whole" and "*Ultima IX* seems more concerned with cranking out the big dollars and alienating the people that made the property what it is today."

Those words represent the feelings of the butchers, bakers and can-



dlestick makers of the RPG set. The hardest of the hard core RPGers *love* the minutia of the game. It's what they live for. It's the plus three Sword of Cap'n Crunch. It's the plus 25-to dexterity Boots of Carl Lewis. It's about lighting the fire. It's about sleeping through the night.

When asked how Del Castillo would answer his former colleague, he stated graciously, "Dan was looking for something else. He was not happy here. We were trying to make a certain kind of game and Dan wanted to make another type of game—perhaps even a better game, and we tried to accommodate that as best we could, but in the end, he found what he wanted somewhere else. [*Reubenfield and White have reemerged at ION Storm.*] We're really happy for him. I hope he finds what he's seeking." You could see in his eyes that he was sincere, but also that this division in the design team had caused some difficult times.

Looking for fresh meat

Game design—it's an art, but obviously, today even more, it's a business. And who can blame Origin for wanting to play to a bigger audience? ("We can! We can!" trill the Dragons.) So how do they plan on appeasing the devotee and attracting the masses?

"We've been trying to impress upon people what we're really focusing on," said Del Castillo." We're trying to focus people on what is new and different about the game. The storyline will be new, but I think that within the genre of fantasy games, you're going to see a story that is very true to *Ultima*, and we fear that this might scare away the people who are not at all familiar with it. They'll wonder 'Do I have to play *Ultimas I-VIII* in order to "get it?"' We didn't want to do this to them by focusing on things like 'a storyline' and 'depth of play' and 'highly immersive world.'"

By focusing on those things, they believe that they would be driving away the core of the market they're trying to target. ("Do it anyway!" cajole the Dragons.) "As in other genres, what we're really trying to do is sort of 'distill' what was fun, and do away with all the other things. For instance, *Command & Conquer* [which Del Castillo produced while at Westwood Studios] really took war gaming out of the Paper Age, as we called it, and out of the Rules Age.... and in essence we're trying to do that with *Ultima Ascension*."

Del Castillo does not believe what seems to many to be intuitive: why would Origin choose to wrap up the entire Avatar series with such a departure from what everyone has come to expect from *Ultima*? Why not create a new series that will attract this "new blood," and leave *Ultima* to the Dragon-minded among us? Ultima creator Richard Garriott believes simply that it was time to move on, especially technologically. Keeping up with the Crofts, we suppose. ■

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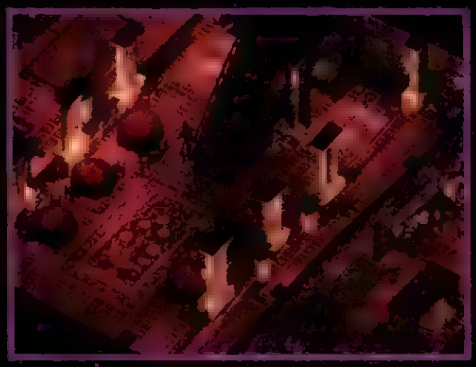

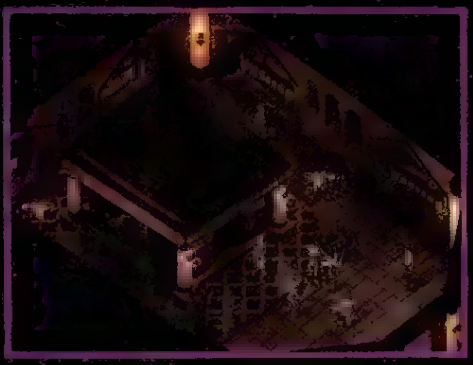

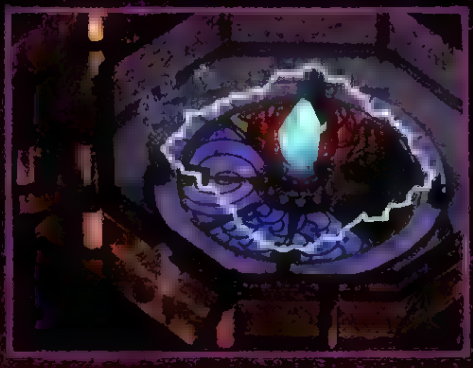

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At what price side quests?

They are guesstimating approximately 100 hours of game play—although how well you will do at real time third person combat will really dictate how long the game will last.

The main goal is (again) to destroy the Guardian, but certainly there will be side-quests—sort of. "My main rule has always been 'no side quests,'" insists Del Castillo. (Oops.) "How I define a side quest is that it is a quest that has no bearing on the game at all." Thank goodness.

What they are trying to do is to provide quests that are always relevant to the storyline, but not always necessary. For example, you might have a side quest to obtain Dupre's armor, but there is a difference between requiring it and making its acquisition give you a certain benefit within the storyline. There will be a point in time where someone won't be able to see you, and you must make yourself known to that person. You can either go and do a quest that allows you to obtain a certain trophy that will enable them to see you and believe that you are who you say you are; or, if you're already wearing Dupre's armor, they will immediately recognize who you are. Hence there are two side quests, only one of which is necessary, but each of which is directly connected to the story.

Navigation and the rider spider

By land or by sea we'll see quite a few modes of transportation. There are walking, teleportation, swimming, and boats (skiffs and rowboats, and long-range seafaring ships). There will be limited flight during the game, but players will be in store for an elevating moment at the end of the game—*Ascension* indeed.

They initially wanted to include horse travel, but ran into too many issues surrounding it: what to do with a horse when you're in the dungeon? What to do with a horse indoors? Can it go upstairs? What can it jump? "A horse is a simple thing to talk about and a very complicated thing to implement," said Del Castillo. "There are a whole lot of collision issues."

You will, however, be able to ride other creatures—spiders, for instance, and certain others that might appear butt-worthy. They've created quite a few vehicles of rapid conveyance. Ride them, tame them, make them your love slave. Ideally they would like to enable you to subdue a spider and keep it as a mount for a certain time. When you dismounted, it would run away, or maybe attack you. Giant rats are another example of this rather exclusive type of transportation. Picture them with little saddles.

Fun for all... can it be done?

What Origin is attempting to do with this title seems to be a monumental task. On the one hand, they want *Ultima* fans to achieve a sense of closure with the series—to walk into that familiar place we have come to cherish, and walk away fulfilled, entertained and informed, all of the Avatar/Guardian issues purged for eternity. And on the other hand, they hope to attract a new audience that hasn't necessarily played the series, who are partial to eye-candy, and who they don't want to feel as though they have to have read eight other volumes before they read the ninth.

Painting the entire project as a "we're keeping in what's fun and throwing out the rest" endeavor fails to address the real issue, which is simply that "what's fun" is different for everyone. For some, it *is* the stunning 3D terrain and fabulous lighting and animation—and they'll all be there, you can bank on it. But for others, like the Ultima Dragons [see sidebar "Dragons on Fire"], it may very well be about baking bread. ■

Spells of mass destruction

Here are a few of the new spells in Ultima Ascension. The artists and animators are working 'round the clock to make sure that each of them provides a truly spectacular effect.

Meteor Storm	Summons Stone Dragon elemental that breathes flaming lava on your enemy!
Crystal Barrier	Summons crystals to shoot up from the earth and block the enemy's path.
Inferno Armor	Envelops the Avatar in a protective armor of flames, inflicting pain to enemies!
Daemon Summoning	Conjures a magical pentagram that summons a daemon from the Abyss to do your bidding.
Icicle Spell	Summons a long spire of ice to impale your opponent.
Lightning Field	Inflicts thunderous clouds of lighting upon targets nearest the Avatar.

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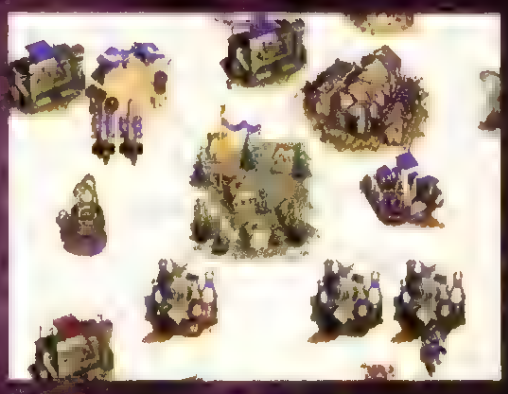

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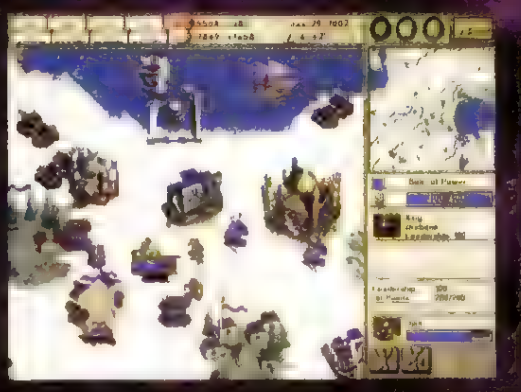

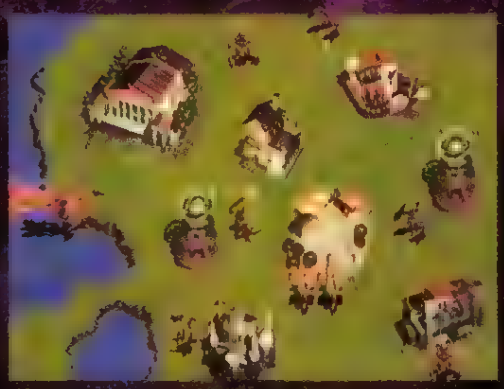

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BY SCOTT U DELL

GOING WHERE ANGELS

APACHE

These days, if you drop into most of the flight sim forums online and ask what is the king of the helicopter games, you'll almost certainly hear *Longbow 2* over and over and over again. When facing such a genre-monopolizing juggernaut you'd think most developers would just look in different directions, but not the folks at Razorback Studios, one of Empire Interactive's semi-in-house design shops. Many of the team, including its head, Kevin Bezeant, worked at Digital Integration, and were involved with the *Apache* and *Hind* helicopter sims. At least they have the background armor with which to gird themselves in doing battle for players' attention; they also think they have the weapons (e.g., gameplay ideas) with which they can whack away at *Longbow*'s hold on gamers' computers

So what, then, are these weapons? *Longbow 2* had *extreme* realism in its portrayal of helicopter systems and flight, and while *Apache Havoc* will have realistic modes, it doesn't seem like they trying to take on *Longbow* in this regard; instead, they are working heavily on two areas· realistic heli copter combat situations and environments, and strong support for multiplayer from the get-go. Threaded throughout all of these is, of course, the dual helicopter nature of the game—in essence, two sims in one.

NAP OF THE EARTH

Even in sims covering the most air-to-air oriented planes you'll often find some kind of ground attack or bombing missions; while the Air Force might not care to do it, gamers love getting down in the weeds. Short of dropping into a tank sim, helicopter games are the best for this; comparatively slow and maneuverable, modern helicopters live at treetop (or lower!) levels when in action. Because of the importance of terrain in helicopter combat, Razorback is focusing a lot of attention on it.

While many other games put pretty (but flat) textures over fixed polygonal meshes, *Apache Havoc* will have terrain that, while good looking, is also realistic in terms of helicopter operations. "We call it sculpted terrain" says Bezeant. "With most sims what you end up getting is a regu lar array of spot heights, so basically the whole map area is covered in right angle triangles, and texture is just applied to that… which looks great—if you've got a fast jet sim and you're up quite high."

What Razorback is doing is taking digital terrain data and massaging it, decreasing polygon counts in flat or very regular terrain (where the extra polygons aren't needed) and increasing counts where the terrain needs more detail, especially where the underlying terrain is very irregular, or where there are linear features like rivers or roads. "With our system, all the polygons are arbitrary, so we basically cut out any shape we want," Bezant says. "So on the side of a hill, instead of having a river or road lying [at an angle on the slope], we actually cut into the hill using geometry and build up some banks, so if there's a river it's flat. At low level it's just a bit more convincing." Forested areas are handled similarly; while they can't yet do individual trees (although Bezeant says they have some ideas for this down the road), their forests are raised off the floor of the terrain, and when something passes through them, the forest is cut away. All this is to give gamers terrain in which they can use actual helicopter tactics. But because of their variable polygon system, maps are relatively small; a test map (of Scotland) that's some 256 by 256 kilometers takes up only 25 megabytes.

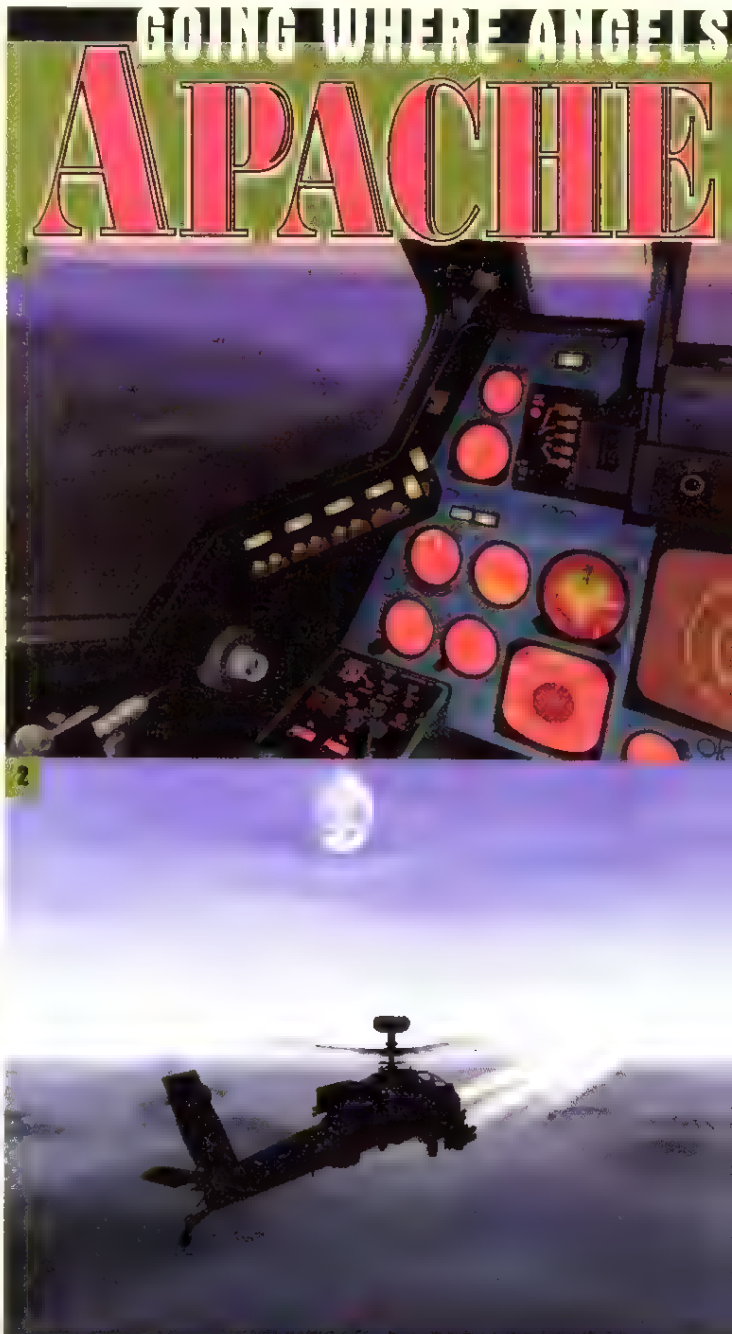
While terrain is a major component of creating their realistic environment, it's not the only one. The second big component is the cockpit in which the player is placed Instead of using 2D cockpits Razorback is modeling both the Apache and Havoc pilot's positions in 3D. At over 100,000 polygons each, they are rendered out in far more detail than will be apparent in the final sim—indeed, if you zoom in using *Lightwave*, the 3D modeling software they use, you can see that screw heads are in 3D, complete with slots for the screwdriver, and knobs have ridges. While this may seem excessive, the detail often carries through, even when rendered down, and it lets them build both a large number of fixed views (some 30 views which, when rendered in different lighting condi tions, become 90 views) as well as a very clean-looking virtual cockpit. Gamers will be able to pan about the cockpit and then, when they stop moving, the game will snap to the closest view—a surprisingly effective method, as you don't see the "snap."

Notice the part about "pilot's position." Says Bezeant, "Basically we've just put so much effort into the pilot's cockpit on both aircraft that we just don't have time to do the co-pilot/gunner, which obviously means that, multiplayer, having one person as pilot, one co-pilot is not possible, but it's always something that we can add later." And this is where *Apache Havoc* differs significantly from *Longbow 2* (but where it's similar to the original *Longbow*): "At the moment the pilot can actually do everything. It's a question we get asked a lot, actually, whether we're doing the co· pilot/gunner, but I think that doing two helicopters like this, and doing them to this level of detail, is giving people something new anyway; for now people can just judge these cockpits as they are."

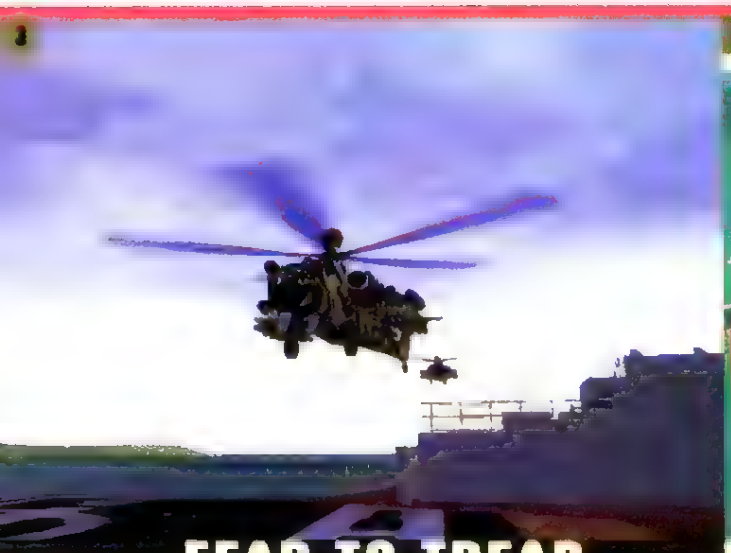
In addition to the terrain and the cockpits, the team is working on including other realistic environmental factors. Days will transition smoothly from dawn to noon to afternoon to dusk to night Stormy weather won't just turn on; instead, a front will move through so you might, for example, get a few clouds, then a light rain, then finally a full-out thunderstorm, all with different amounts of lighting, wind, and precipitation. Bezeant explains the reason for all this effort: "These helicopters are all-weather, day/night capable, so all that [work] adds a lot of atmosphere to the game."

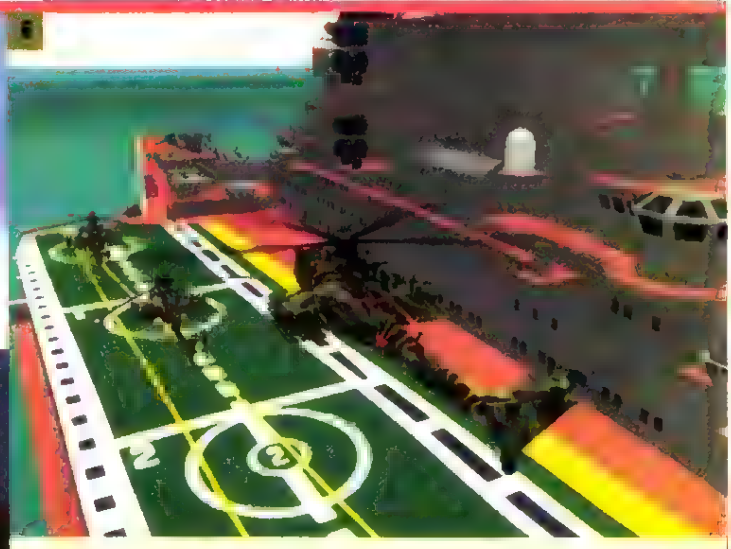
TAKING ON THE BEST

Another keystone in Razorback's design philosophy is that of making multiplayer part of the game from the very start. Indeed, because of the

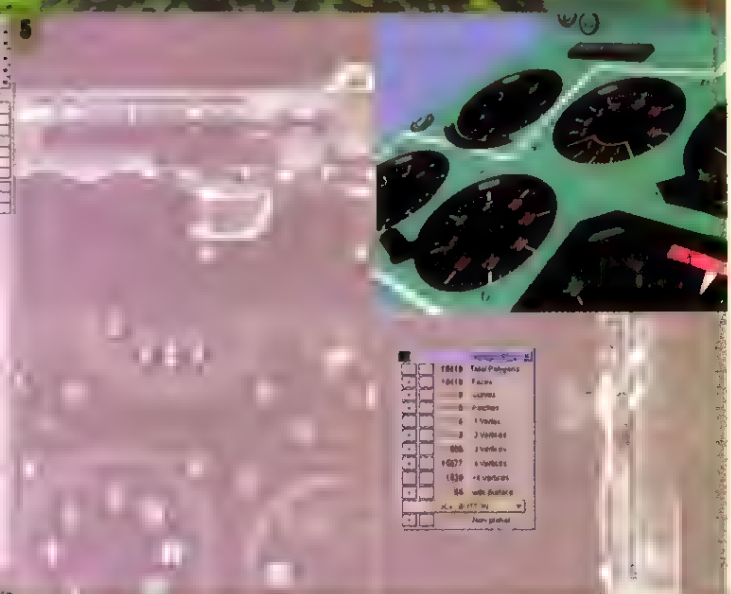


[1] The game models cockpit lighting under three different conditions: day, dawn/dusk/storm, and night (seen here) [2] The Longbow at dusk [3] A Havoc from two screws [6] Two of the campaigns will probably involve extensive amphibious operations; while neither helicopter is currently slated for amphibious operations.





FEAR TO TREAD HAVOC



nature of the campaign engine, it doesn't really matter whether a player is flying solo or with other gamers, either in competition or cooperatively—it'll all be the same to the system; in essence, solo gamers are flying missions in a multiplayer world, missions where all the other players are computer controlled.

Multiplayer doesn't just encompass single missions, but entire campaigns as well (they will include small "deathmatch" maps for faster action). Because of this, the campaigns have to be fully dynamic in nature. "With the multiplayer game, it's two [or more] of you playing, and if you go and land we can't sort of close the curtains, and let you watch your debriefing, and you start up again and it's eight hours later, because somebody else is still playing—so the time of day has to be continuous." You are, therefore, always in the gameworld, even when you're back at base; "If I land in order to refuel and rearm, I'm still an active component in the game, so I'm still vulnerable. I imagine that we'll get situations in the game where, if you allow yourself to be followed home, and you land to rearm and refuel, during that delay you are extremely [laughs] vulnerable—that may lead to some nail-biting moments!"

Right now there isn't a campaign-level "wargame mode" (although they might develop something like that for a future expansion). Instead, the computer generates tasks based on events within the world. A tank unit fights a battle, runs low on ammo, and generates a resupply task, the supply unit gets it, moves out, and generates a request for escort, and you as the gamer may choose to fly that task—if not, the computer will assign someone else (if anyone's available!). Gamers, too, can generate tasks; for example, a call for artillery will be just another task.

Tasks will queue up, shifting position within the queue based on priority; you can either follow computer assignments or go off on your own. If a mission is multi-ship you may get other human or AI pilots to go with you; you could certainly run into situations where you have a mission that needs flying but not enough helicopters to do it—decision time! There won't be specific, canned missions in the game; instead, they'll run the campaign engine at high speed until the appropriate type of mission comes up, then let players fly that—in essence, a super sophisticated random mission generator.

TWO SIMS IN ONE

The final feature of *Apache Havoc* is, of course, its inclusion of two opposing helicopters in the same game. Says Bezeant, "I know that people have done sims with more than one vehicle before, but they tend to be watered down. We can do a full simulation of each." Indeed, they are even considering two separate flight manuals, one for each of the two helicopters. Multiplayer was the key reason for this approach. "What we wanted to do was put the Apache and the Havoc helicopters in one package so it means from day one you can go up against a real opponent, rather than flying head to head against another Apache." A follow on game, *Comanche Hokum*, will include each side's reconnaissance/attack helicopter, and all four will be able to fly on common battlefields. But that's all something for down the road; for now gamers can focus on flying and fighting the Apache or the Havoc—remember, keep your head down! ■

business end [4] All-weather craft means this has to be an all-weather sim [5] A close-up of the model of the Havoc's cockpit; note the individually modeled the potential is there (the Royal Marines, for example, were interested in the Apache)

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INDEPENDENCE WAR

INFOGRAMES

For the past several months, gamers on the other side of the Atlantic have had the opportunity to "fly" a 150 meter long, 185,000-ton starship in Infogrames' *I-War*. This is a game that has caused something of a buzz for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that *I-War* revolves around commanding a small capital ship, which is unlike the vast majority of games in the space combat genre which are based around the starfighter. By modeling such a massive vessel, developer Particle Systems has thrown Newtonian physics into the mix, meaning that mass, momentum, and inertia are factors as important as lasers and missiles. Then there are the frenzied battles that at times rival those seen in *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. It doesn't hurt that gamers have noted the impressive graphics, all the more so in light of the fact they're not 3D accelerated. Top it off with one of stronger story lines to come along in some time. With qualities like these, it's probably obvious why Infogrames and Particle Systems are readying a U.S. version of the game, titled *Independence War* (the original name was already trademarked in the U.S.)

Independence War is set more than 200 years into the future, during the time when an overcrowded Earth struggles to deal with a guerrilla war out in the stars. Players command the *Dreadnaught*, a Commonwealth Navy corvette and the former command of Jefferson Clay. The Navy's greatest captain, Clay earned his hero reputation the good ol' fashioned way, he died for it. The *Dreadnaught* is a sleek looking vessel, bearing a passing resemblance to the *Defiant* on *Deep Space 9*. Command of this warship is accomplished by jumping about four primary bridge stations: Command, Navigation, Weapons, and Engineering. Each of the stations have their obvious specialties; for example, should the ship take damage during combat, switching to the Engineering station allows you to direct the efforts of the damage repair teams. But since the ship is made up of more than 30 key systems, it's often a desperate race to repair things before it's too late. Systems also need to be repaired in a logical order as well. It's no use fixing the weapons systems first if the reactor to power them is still off-line or the power grid to deliver that power is crippled.

TEAM WORK

A startling fact is that the entire game—from the design, the programming, the missions, the art, the sound, and the lengthy animated scenes—was done by a team of six. In a day and age when some computer games have credits that rival motion picture productions, six seems like an awfully small number for a game of this scale and scope. Still, Particle Systems has managed to create not only an involving game, but a sensation of playing around in a vast universe as well. The *Dreadnaught* has several means of getting about. First, there are the thrusters, which operate at the speeds combat takes place. Then there's the LDS system, a sort of sublight speed designed for inner-system travel. Then, to 'jump' from star system to star system, there're the capsule drives, which operate only at strategic Lagrange Points (actual points in space where the gravitational pull and centrifugal forces of two bodies cancel each other out). With these kind of propulsion systems, there's a strong temptation to explore the galaxy. In fact, co-designer Glyn Williams says that they had made it possible to freely explore for testing purposes, but removed it afterwards. Still, he does mention that this kind of open, dynamic universe could be a goal further down the road. For now, *Independence War* is built around approximately 40 scripted missions.

The physics of the game seem very real. Just how real might be up to debate, but as Williams puts it, "we could design the physics to fit the game." He says they were aiming for the kind of chaotic fleet actions seen in movies and television shows—it's not unusual to watch as ships tumble out of control. Mastering the physics is also one of the challenges. The game is more easily played from the assisted flight mode, which automatically corrects for inertial slide. This results in a flight experience not unlike those found in conventional starfighter games. However, experts may tackle the free flight mode, which disables the computer controlled flight assistance. While difficult to master, this opens the door to a number of complicated inertial maneuvers.

RANGE
VESS
PROSPECT OF INDIE LOOTING...THE DEBRIS FIELD IS PROTECTED BY HUNTER-SEEKER MINES. THESE WILL BE ALERTED TO YOUR PRESENCE AND RE-ACTIVATED.

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2

3

[1] A briefing for a salvage mission [2] Orbiting Earth. If it looks good, it's because the textures were taken from NASA photos gorgeous blue nebula [5] Trouble from behind [6] Scotty, I need main power in 30 seconds or else we're dead!

STATESIDE CHANGES

So what are differences between *I War* and *Independence War*? The main changes are in the visual realm, as Particle Systems has added support for 3Dfx Voodoo and Voodoo2 accelerators. With hardware acceleration, the geometry of the ships has been increased. In *I War*, primary models consisted of about 300 polygons, a number that has been raised to around 650 polygons, meaning more detailed ships. The 3D eye-candy also translates into background gas nebulas, translucent smoke trails for missiles, and a *Star Trek*-like shield effect. The textures have also been redone—an effect best seen when cruising about our own solar system. A quick jaunt around Jupiter reveals moons like Io and Europa in just about the right places with textures taken from NASA probes, so the heavenly bodies look heavenly.

Gameplay-wise, a new arcade-type mode is being introduced to pacify the trigger-happy (i.e., Americans). In this action-heavy mode, the players weapons are stronger while enemy vessels are also easier to destroy. The arcade flight model also lessens the mass of the *Dreadnaught*, meaning a more responsive ship. And finally, a few minor scripting problems will be fixed in the missions, including a doozy near the beginning that explains just how Jefferson Clay "survived" his martyrdom. Before European readers start grumbling about pampered Americans and all the nice new features they're getting, relax—a free upgrade will be made available online at about the same time *Independence War* comes out in the states, which should be early this Fall.

I-WAR

THE EUROPEAN VERSION REVIEWED

[redacted]

I-War • Infogrames • www.infogrames.com
Requirements: Windows 95, 90 MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

READIES A GAME FOR STARSHIP TROOPERS

4

5

6

[3] Docked at the station; notice the computerized vector trail from the departing ship [4] The Dreadnaught against a

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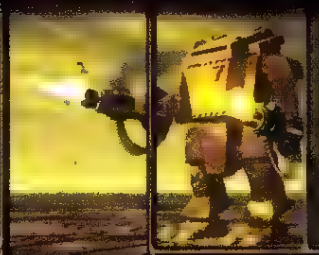

COMING FALL 1998

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BY SCOTT UDELL

If you needed a poster child for good ol' fashioned, hard core, turn-based gaming values, you'd be hard pressed to find one better than the *Warlords* series. From the single-map game that was the original *Warlords* we've seen the series evolve: *Warlords II* added many more maps and a random map generator, while *Warlords II Deluxe* added an extensive editor and a slew of special units; *Warlords III* deepened the series' gameplay—with things like the expanded use of heroes and magic, extensive customizability options, and improved multiplayer support—at the same time it brought the franchise's graphics quality up to a more modern level (it did not, however, ship with an editor). So what's next? *Warlords III Deluxe*? *Warlords IV*?

WARLORDS III: DARKLORDS RISING

If you build a better warlord, will the world beat a path to your door?

Neither. Red Orb and developer SSG have been working on something in between, something they call *Warlords III: Darklords Rising*. Set some 1100 years after *Warlords III*, it portrays the return of Lords Bane and Sartek, those two destruction-loving dudes, to the land of Etheria, where they wreak merry havoc across a number of new campaigns and missions.

In brief, *Darklords Rising* includes everything that *Warlords III* did: the 10 scenario campaign, the 13 stand-alone scenarios, the 82 army types, the 10 hero types, the 20 spells, and 10 abilities. Then it adds four new campaigns (totaling 28 scenarios), 15 new stand alone scenarios, 30 new army types (all of them fantasy-oriented—there won't be any sci fi or historical units), five new heroes, 15 new spells and 6 10 new abilities. It also reintroduces personalities (basically, handicapping) to the series. It also expands the kinds of games you can play in multiplayer (including co-op play) and in random missions. Red Orb's Dexter Chow (Senior Producer on the title) says that they are working on improving the already strong AI. Perhaps most significantly, it adds something a small core of players have been clamoring for since *Warlords III*, a series of editors.

Chow says that they have spent almost as much time in development of this follow-on game as they have on the original. What *hasn't* changed significantly is the engine. When we offered up the comparison to *Heroes of Might and Magic* and it's sequel *Heroes of Might and Magic II*, Chow agrees whole-heartedly; however, he says he resisted attempts to turn this game into *Warlords IV* specifically because they weren't giving gamers a new engine. Sure, there's a lot of new stuff with which to enhance and expand their *Warlords III* experience, but not the different experience, one with a different *feel*, that he believes would be needed for the next numerical increase in the series. Nevertheless, this is considered a full game (and will be sold as such—there are currently no plans for an upgrade path), so let's take a more detailed look at what it offers.

EDIT ME THIS

A major part of the new game, the various editors are divided up into two separate packages, the Scenario Builder and the Campaign Builder. The Campaign Builder is simply used to combine existing scenario files into campaigns, and is decidedly utilitarian. You will be able to write back-story text, tie the scenarios together, and, according to Chow, specify the carry over of components from scenario to scenario. Because they've basically eliminated the between-scenario full-motion video cut scenes of *Warlords III*, gamers should be able to compile campaigns equal in quality to those SSG creates.

The Scenario Builder, however, is where the bulk of the creative potential lies. It has several separate editors: an item editor for creating new artifacts and an extensive map editor are perhaps the most significant, although the sides, data, intro, and diplomacy editors will all be important tools for creating an integrated scenario.

The sharp eyed will note one editor not included—a unit editor. *Warlords II Deluxe* achieved some notoriety amongst the hard-core because of its flexible unit editor, a tool gamers used to create many non-fantasy armies and settings. This, however, was back in the days of non-animated unit icons; the animation, shadowing, increased color depth, and multiple facings of units in *Warlords III* mean that a unit editor would, according to Chow, be impractical. This also explains the lack of any new "funky" unit types beyond the *Warlords* norm; he says that even the 30 new units have been a big effort (most of it involved in the artwork).

NEW UPON THE LAND

Much of what's new expands on existing gameplay components; instead of going into explicit detail on the added armies, skills, heroes, and spells, we've summarized them (see tables I, II, and III). There are

[If the Map Editor is where you'll spend the bulk of your time when designing scenarios, [illegible] This shows the map you're working on]

plenty of other little tweaks and additions beyond those listed in the tables. There are two new sites, a Ranger Tower (+2 to the view range of all armies created in the nearest city) and a Barracks (-1 to production time of armies created in the nearest city). Armies may now rebuild a razed city (for 800 gold). SSG has expanded the random map generation options, giving you control over the amount of forest, mountain, and river terrain that will be generated. You now have several vectoring options, including the ability to increase the time vectoring takes across extra long distances. Some routines have been written to improve computer performance in new game types. While not in the build we have, the game will have four to six new terrain types, including "ice" terrain (snowy hills, mountain, forests, etc.)

Chow is enthused over the new game types and three new victory conditions they've designed for *Darklords Rising*. In addition to the "standard" game type there are now seven varieties of games for random maps. Heirs to an Ancient Power, where each side starts with a hero with a powerful magical artifact. Battle of the Titans with each side starting with a level 10 hero. Against the Horde where Black starts in the north with 15 cities and all other players start in the south, allied, with one city each. Crusade, where White starts in the north with five cities and lots of armies, while all other sides start in the south, allied, with one city each. North vs. South, where four sides start allied in the north and the other four allied in the south. Instant Chaos, all sides start clumped together in the center of the map. Two Against the World, where two sides with three cities each start allied in the center of the map and all other sides start allied with one city each, off on the edge of the map; and Hammer and Anvil, where two sides with three cities each start allied, one in the north, one in the south, with the others allied and starting off in between.

Three new victory conditions are especially good for multiplayer. King of the Hill awards victory to the side that can hold the city of Utopia (which starts the game with an income of 100 gold, has its mana level set to 10 Gray, and is stocked with neutral armies for ten turns). Capture the Flag gives each side a powerful magic item the hero carrying it is indicated with a flag, the side that can collect all of them wins. Fortress asks the player who will be warlord to first capture all of the capital cities.

ON TO BATTLE

So obviously there's a lot of new "stuff" but it all fits within the *Warlords III* context. A veteran of that game will feel right at home. Just like folks who played *Command & Conquer* could jump right into *Red Alert* or folks who played *Heroes of Might and Magic* could start playing its sequel with nary a glance at the manual. Even in its alpha incarnation, *Darklords Rising* plays just like *Warlords III*. Chow acknowledges this but says he feels they've given gamers enough new (much of it gamer requested) to justify calling it a new game.

New Skills

Skills	Function
Banding	Units increase their strength up to the banding bonus) for every similar unit in a stack
Paralysis	Similar to poison and disease, but affected army has three points removed from its movement allowance
Curse	Works like poison and disease; affected armies have their medals and blessings removed
Trample	A unit with the trample skill inflicts an extra point of damage for every point of trampling skill whenever it hits in melee combat (ineffective against flying units)
Lightning	A unit with this skill has a 10% chance per point of lightning of reducing an opponent's hits to half when a new opponent steps up to fight
Acid	Like Lightning

New Heroes & Their Spells

Heroes	Their Spells
Monk	Body Control
	Mighty Blow
	Mind Control
Alchemist	Create Golem
	Create Item
Bard	Song of Battle
	Song of Fortune
	Song of Life
	Song of Stone
	Storm Song
Summoner	Greater Demon
	Summon Hound
	Minor Demon
	Summon Imp
	Teleport
Barbarian	(no spells)
Necromancer (An old hero...)	Wraithcall (...gets a new spell)

New Armies

Assassin
Ballistae
Giant Bees
Black Dragon
Blue Dragon
Cockatrice
Green Dragon
Rock Elemental
Water Elemental
Ghosts
Gold Dragon
Clay Golem
Iron Golem
Stone Golem
Green Slime
Halfling
Harpy
Hellhound
Ice Demon
Imp
Medusa
Mummy
Nightmare
Peasants
Giant Rats
Red Dragon
Scorpions
Spectre
Silver Dragon
Undead Dragon
Unicorns

4

5

Unusual maps become more common as the campaign progresses. Here, Green is surrounded by Red and the Neutral wants you to pay for safe passage.

A blue team member (in the center of the screen) attempts to gun down a fleeing red team member ▶

FireTeam

Feeling (anti) social? Reach out and touch someone...

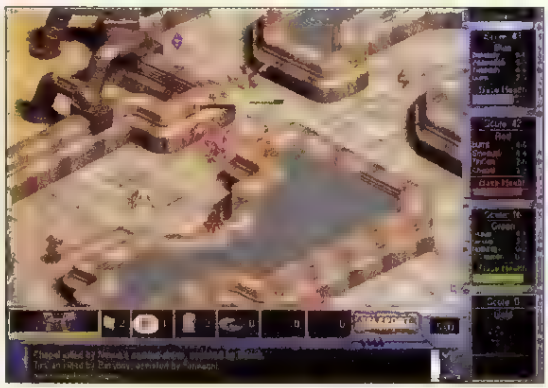
FireTeam is an online-only action game reminiscent of Origin's *Crusader: No Remorse*. You play in isometric arenas, attempting to achieve whatever goal the particular scenario calls for with your team. Each team can have up to four members, all of whom you can speak to in real-time thanks to the headset included with the game.

The installation procedure for the game is simple, leading you through configuring your headset to work with Windows 95, and then allowing you to test it. Once that's done, you register an account with Multitude via their web site, and then return to the game client to enter the game lobby itself.

The game lobby checks to see if you have the latest version of *FireTeam*; if not, it patches the game to bring you up to date. The lobby itself is stark and spartan, and reminiscent of Kali's. You can chat with people via keyboard, view information on games in progress, and otherwise join or start your own game. Unfortunately, there's no support for one-on-one voice communication when in the lobby; this seems a shame when you consider that real-time voice is a key selling point of the game.

Each game is ten minutes long—a length chosen to allow short "in and out" games, thus allowing as many people on the service to play as possible. You select from various types of games to play, including the classic "Capture the Flag" scenario, "BaseTag," where part of your team defends your base and the rest attempts to find and destroy the enemies' base, "Gunball," or football with guns, and finally "Team Deathmatch," a scenario with a twist that rewards you for protecting teammates. Multitude plans to expand and update the game even after launched, adding new scenarios, maps, and (possibly) character types to play.

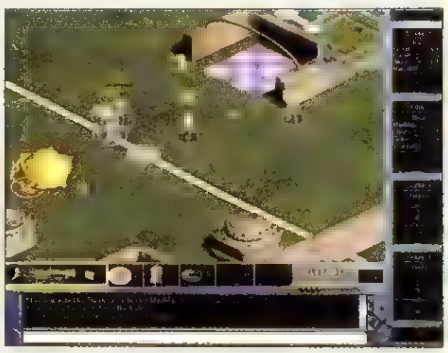
You start a game by selecting the type of game, the character type you wish to play (Commando, Scout, Gunner), and the team side you're on. Each character has different strengths and weaknesses—the Commando is the best, all-around character in terms of firepower and mobility, the Gunner has heavier weaponry at his disposal but moves more slowly, and the Scout moves the quickest and carries enemy detection gear which conveys radar information to teammates.



▲ A three-way (or team) game, with a green team member taking fire in the center.

The autoturret can be used to secure areas of strategic importance. Just keep it supplied with ammo! ▶

Green Team decimates Red Team's base in a spirited game of BaseTag. ▶



Yes, it's football with big guns... it doesn't get any better than this! ▼

Once you've selected a game and it fills up, you're launched into the arena. You quickly move toward your objectives, talking (or as the case might be, yelling) to your squad as the situation shifts around you. The voice quality is surprisingly good, although there are occasional dropouts. More annoying are the mixing problems, where some game sound effects are significantly louder than teammates' voices—there are times when it is difficult to hear a cry for help over the din. This is likely to be fixed by the time the game is released.

Movement is controlled via the keyboard and mouse. The keyboard allows you to move about, crouch/stand, and select certain items or weapons via hotkeys. Motion feels slightly slow, probably due to latency-masking, but is still quite playable—just don't expect any roll, stand, and fire sorts of stunts like you might be able to pull in *Crusader: No Remorse*. The mouse is used to target objects or enemies in the game. One nice feature of targeting is that the game takes into account the time you take to aim at something—the longer you hold the crosshair over a target before firing, the better percentage chance you have to hit. This causes the game to feel somewhat more strategic, and a little less like an all-out deathmatch.

FireTeam takes the social aspect (or lack thereof) of online gaming head-on, and is definitely on to something. It's unlikely you'll feel as attached to online teammates elsewhere as you do while playing this game. If Multitude can iron out some of the voice drop-outs and sound mixing issues, they just might have a small revolution in online gaming on their hands... *–André Vrignaud*

FireTeam • Multitiude • Windows 95

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MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 2

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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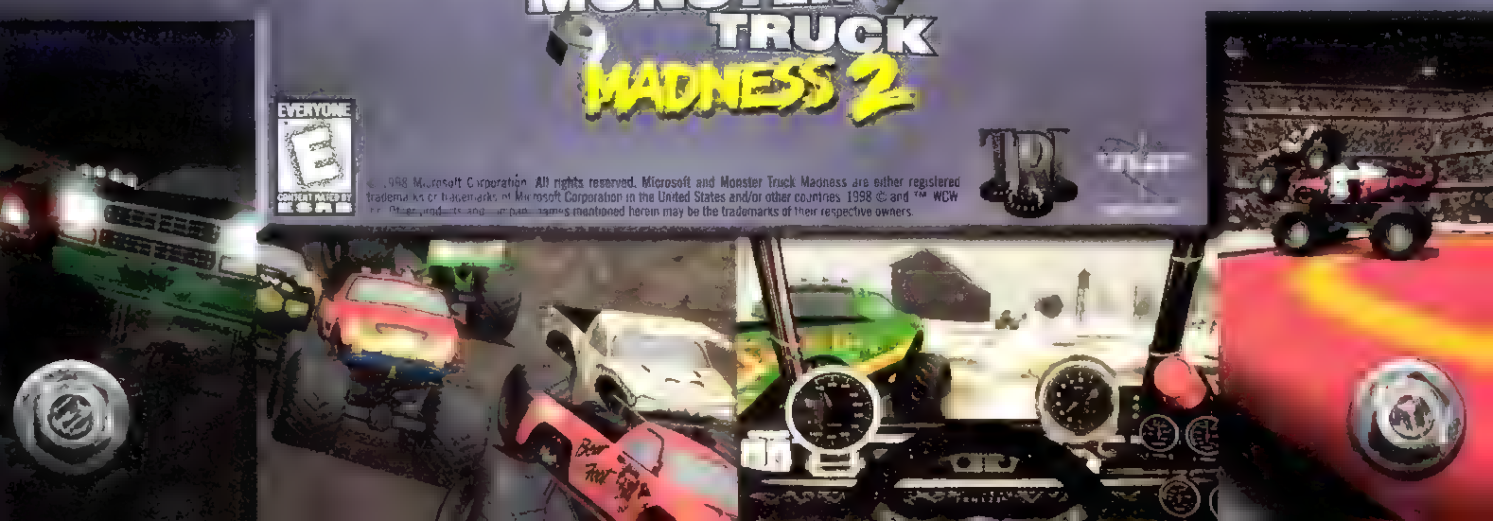
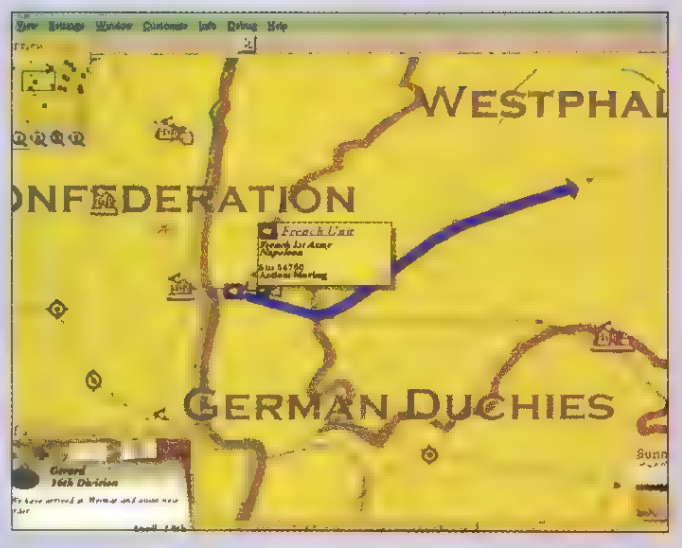


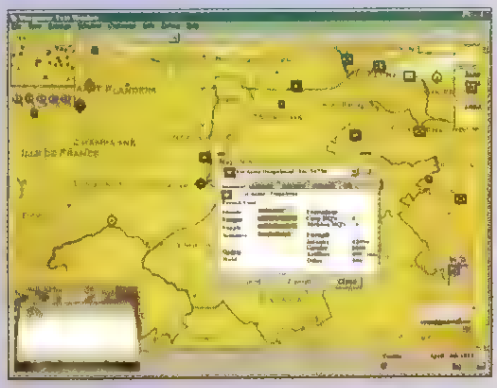


Napoleon on the move; the solid line shows the movement path, the dashed line behind the unit shows where it's stretched out along the road

Wargamer: Napolean 1813

Campaigning with L'Empereur

Operational or strategic-level Napoleonic games are a lot like the weather—everyone talks about them, but rarely has anyone done anything about them… at least until now. Empire's Greenius studio, headed by Steven Green, has been quietly working on just such a game for about two years now, and we are the first to get a look at the game wargamers have been clamoring for. The working title is *Napoleon 1813*, and it's the first in what Empire has nicknamed the *Wargamer* series (also a working title). The second game in the series—planned to ship nine months after *Napoleon*—will cover the U.S. Civil War, and designer Benedict Wilkins says user input may play a part in determining what a third game will portray (he says that the system "is basically designed to simulate any large-scale conflict between 1700 and 1900").



The game covers the 1813 and 1814 campaigns in central Europe and France, and will provide several different gameplay options: you can fight the entire campaign from February 1813 to the middle of 1814, or can game out shorter segments on the full map or subsets on smaller maps. They are working on multiplayer, but it may not make it into the initial game (if it doesn't, it'll probably come out later as a patch/update). The game will be two-tiered, with an operational/strategic scale for the movement of armies and the conduct of non-combat operations (supply, diplomacy, etc) and a tactical scale for the actual resolutions of battles (when we saw the game the tactical level hadn't been implemented yet, but the operational/strategic level was already roughly playable).

▲ Information on the French 1st Army under Napoleon

Most of the artwork in the game is original ▶

▼ The campaign level has four zoom settings; pictured is the closest in

At the operational/strategic level they are doing several things different from the norm. First off, the game will run in real time (perhaps "adjustable continuous time" is a better term). Wilkins says they like this approach because it lets them do things that would be impossible in board wargames. This doesn't mean they are doing a *Clone & Conquer* game with Napoleonic overtones—rather, the game is closer to *Sid Meier's Gettysburg!* or the upcoming *Road to Moscow*. Says Wilkins, "We don't want to make the game totally real-time; I know wargamers don't like it to become a click-fest, which we're trying to avoid. We want the player to think about his plan, set that plan up, then go away and *know* his troops will do roughly what he wanted them to do." Gamers have the option of having the game pause while they enter orders, and the speed the game runs at will be adjustable. Also, the game will allow the gamer to enter orders, and then advance the game in increments of a day, a week, or two weeks, essentially making the game turn-based with simultaneously executed turns.

The second difference is that instead of having a grid-based map, the operational map will be node oriented, basically following the road-city-fortress network as it existed then. "We feel this makes the game more historical," says Wilkins. "It also gives us a real shot at making a really good, strong AI. It also allows us to [make] the AI behave like a historical general."

Command and control (complete with communications delays) plays a big part in the game, as do other real-world issues like supply, the politics of the era, non-combat attrition, roadway bottlenecks, recruitment, and national morale. You as the commander of a side will have to balance out the characteristics, quirks, and capabilities (which means strengths *and* weaknesses) of your various generals and their troops; for example, you may not want to put Ney in charge of a defense, nor put a Russian general in charge of Swedish troops. Generals may, depending on their level of aggressiveness, modify your orders based on their style of command.

Even though the tactical engine wasn't ready to be shown, quite a few of the details have been fixed. It is also real time, but this time it is grid based (invisible hexes). Given the game's "high commander" emphasis (Wilkins notes that "Napoleon never sent an order to anything less than a corps"), the basic maneuver element you'll command will be a division, although regiments/battalions will be represented on the field. While Green was the programmer on *Fields of Glory* and *The Civil War* (Empire's Mark Havens is quick to point out that he was the programmer, not the designer on those less-than-well-received games), they want to avoid the "toy soldier look" of those and other games—they want you to feel like you're controlling a massive army. *–Scott Udell*

Wargamer: Napoleon 1813 • Empire Interactive • Windows 95

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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Soldiers at War

From North Africa to VE Day with Willy and Joe

While there are a fair number of squad-level, turn based games on the market (counting bargain bins), nearly every one of them has a fictional or futuristic setting. Enter SSI, with *Soldiers at War*, a game developed by Random Games and based on the engine used in New World Computing's *Wages of War*. When Random developed that game, they chose a near future mercenary force as their focus; this time, it's your average squad of dogfaces, circa 1942-45, which gets the call.

Make no mistake, though. While *Soldiers at War* is chock full of WWII weapons, uniforms, and locales, this is the war according to Warner Bros., not the War Department. SSI and Random make no bones about this; the focus of the game is clearly war as it was in the movies, and there are no claims to the contrary. You have your multi ethnic platoon—the Italian guy, the big hick, the bookworm, the Jewish kid, the Swede, and even a fairly large group of African Americans. You have your selection of desperate missions, far beyond the milieu of the average GI—commando raids, covert ops, deep raids behind enemy lines. And you have heroics—impossible shots, staggering endurance, incredible toughness despite multiple bullet wounds. In many ways, it's just like the movies, only without John Wayne.

There are fifteen campaign scenarios, which are also playable separately, and three "ambush" scenarios that occur after certain missions. SSI provides a decent selection of custom missions, both single and multiplayer, and some of these allow you to play the German side for a little Teutonic hell raising. Up to four can play over a LAN or the Internet; it works, but it can be very slow, depending on how fast each player moves, and there is no way to save multiplayer games in progress. Most interestingly, there is also a full featured mission editor, which allows the creation of individual scenarios (though not campaigns) for solo or network/Internet play.

In practice, all of this adds up to something less than the sum of its parts. While game graphics are generally excellent—the buildings, equipment, and extras like ships and planes are fantastic—the interface is awkward and parts of the game seem rough. The interface panels take up too much of the game screen. There are no keyboard equivalents for the most commonly-used commands. Equipping soldiers is slow and frustrating, as every item must be moved to or from its respective storage area individually, and the lists of equipment reset with every switch to a different listing. One mission (the Rhine bridge) cannot be completed successfully without using the editor to remove certain victory conditions, and the game accesses the CD every time a soldier does anything, which is infuriating.

The campaign game is enjoyable, but forget

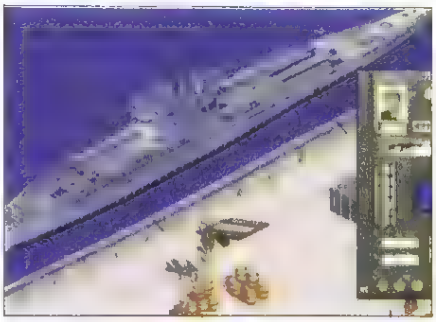
clockwise from right

Your band of merry men deploys through a building

Your platoon. Three guys have already paid the ultimate price

Das Boot—a pleasant battle by the sea-side

This tank is profaning sacred ground. Let's kill it



table; there is little sense of continuity or purpose, and though experienced soldiers become lean, mean fighting machines by the end of the game, they never develop any personality like the mercs in *Jagged Alliance* for example. Perhaps the lack of any use of voice beyond a handful of "I can't do that" phrases accounts for the faceless nature of these grunts. Individual battles can be tense, exciting affairs, but the complete lack of any morale rules means soldiers fight until death, never flinch or duck, and are oblivious to their surroundings. Even in Hollywood soldiers panic, cower, and run; why not here? And the line of sight rules are Byzantine at best and impenetrable at worst; the manual does not explain much, and the seven levels of elevation available on each map make it very difficult to get a good grip on the lay of the land. And finally, tanks and other vehicles are stationary—they never, ever, move.

Despite its flaws, though, the game is fairly successful in capturing the spirit of WWII tactical combat as the movies present it. Burp-guns belch fire, potato mashers blast machine gun nests, machine guns chatter and most everything blows up real good. The editor is flexible and powerful, and while the AI for the enemy soldiers is occasionally lacking (entering the map facing the wrong direction, etc.), the tactical situations in the game are generally challenging. Too bad Random and SSI couldn't have provided a decent strategic wrapper for this game. After all, if you eschew realism for fun, why not go whole hog and give gamers a Metaviran-quality diversion? Sirtech did with *Jagged Alliance*; let's hope Random and SSI can do the same with their next tactical game, *Chaos Gate*.

Robert Mayer

★ ★ ★

Soldiers at War

SSI • www.ssionline.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 120Mhz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, • Multiplayer: 2-4 players, LAN, Internet

Dark Omen

The latest Warhammer is a near Myth

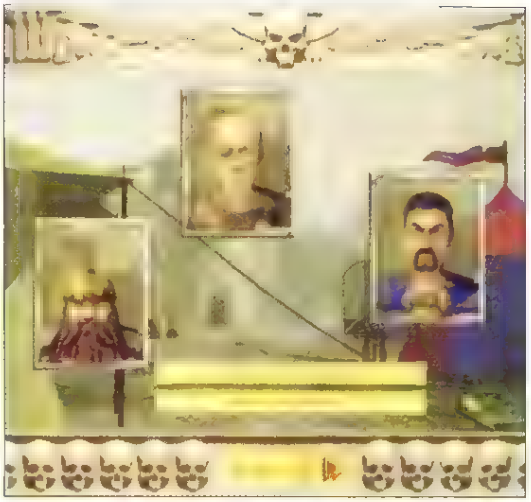
The real-time strategy craze was still in its infancy when Mindscape released the predecessor to *Warhammer: Dark Omen*, but even then it could be said that *Shadow of the Horned Rat* was a shining example of everything that was both right and wrong with the genre. Forgoing the more abstract approach of *Warcraft*, Games Workshop set out to bring the tactical depth of their tabletop miniatures game to the computer. Detailed regimental controls and realistic pacing showed just how "real" a real-time game could be, but a clumsy interface and overt action elements (the bane of any *grognard*) left players with a game that they either hated to love or loved to hate. Two years and one publisher later, Games Workshop is ready to prove that they have learned from experience and crafted a truly excellent fantasy tactical wargame . . . almost. The fly-to-ointment ratio is certainly much improved this time around, but a few nagging flaws still manage to drag *Dark Omen* back from the brink of greatness.

A number of improvements to the interface make commanding your regiments in *Dark Omen* a more streamlined affair. The full-screen view window makes for much better situational awareness, especially when you consider that the battlefields are smaller on average than those in *Shadow of the Horned Rat*. Selecting and commanding units is a snap, and it needs to be—the only action units will take on their own is to fight back when attacked and rout when their morale falters. Any other sort of action requires specific orders. Infantry will gladly sit with their backs to an approaching enemy regiment until you tell them to wheel and engage, missile units will blithely continue to fire on a target even after it has engaged one of your own regiments… you get the idea. The micromanagement is micromanageable, but like its predecessor *Dark Omen* lacks the invaluable option of issuing orders while the game is paused, and at times it feels as if the game is testing your reflexes rather than your tactical prowess. Adding to the sting is the continued presence of the almost universally despised "hero button," an option that allows you to boost a regiment's fighting ability by pounding on the button repeatedly with Whack-A-Mole-esque fury. Use of the button is not required to win, and while it does have a kind of cathartic appeal, it also places emphasis on a facet of real-time gaming that most players would rather do away with.

The campaign remains one of the strongest elements of the game, and this is where *Dark Omen* actually surpasses other real-time games on the market. Rather than a string of largely unrelated scenarios that offer constantly changing forces and little sense of personal advancement, the player retains and adds to the same core army over the course of the campaign. Troops fight better with experience, and the player can now improve regiments' armor and reassign magic items between scenarios as well. Reinforcements are always available between missions (as long as you have enough gold), and it no longer costs money to field regiments. Whether or not this is an improvement is largely a matter of taste—the extra money gives you more flexibility in replacing casualties (the need for perfect victories was a common criticism of the original game), but a bit of the mercenary flavor is lost in the process. Simply making more gold available would have been a better solution.

The story is decent, and though it lacks the dark and original atmosphere of *Myth*, it does have a few strengths of its own. The player is offered periodic choices during the cutscenes that lead to side missions or change the nature of a battle. Helping the dwarves fight their way through a mountain pass might delay your own mission, but could yield a valuable reward. The siege of Helmgart can be played on either the attacking or defending side, depending on how quickly you get there. These options do not entirely hide the fact that the overall plot is linear, but they do make the player feel like more of a participant and less like a passenger merely tagging along for the ride.

Make no mistake—*Dark Omen* is not perfect. There is still a little too much emphasis on action, and not all of the shortcomings of the game's predecessor have been eliminated. The improvements that have been made add substantially to the game's appeal, but are they enough to appease the critics of *Shadow of the Horned Rat*? Perhaps. If not, they can still take their aggressions out by pounding on the hero button… *Benjamin E. Sones*



[clockwise from right]

Decisions, decisions… choices offered in some cutscenes allow the player to explore multiple story branches

The terrain in Dark Omen is as varied as it is pretty

Morgan Bernhardt and his Grudgebringer mercenaries are back and ready for action

The overhead map pauses the game and allows the player to assess the strength of enemy units

It is unlikely that this Imperial steam tank would pass California emissions…

★★★½

Warhammer: Dark Omen

Electronic Arts • www.darkomen.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 120MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2 players, Internet, LAN, modem, null-modem

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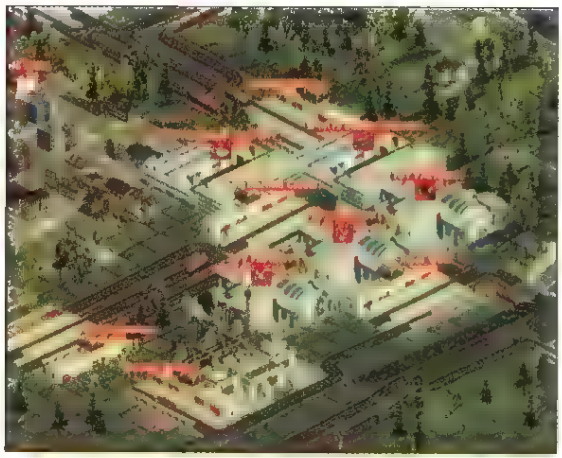
Industry Giant

Or perhaps Micro-Management Giant



clockwise from right)

Behind the scenes at Toys-R-Us

Another good year

Convincing the "Old Man" to make you boss

Gearing up toy production

This is really annoying

Interactive Magic's release of *Industry Giant* is essentially a translation of the German original *Der Industrie Gigant*. Occasionally the game reveals it's roots either in the scenarios set in Germany or more discretely in the background where the newspaper headlines are in German. Playing the game is a lot like dating the stereotypical cheerleader; very attractive to look at but after a while you find yourself wishing there was more inside.

Visually speaking, *Industry Giant* is a dead ringer for MicroProse's *Transport Tycoon*, using the same isometric view and similar transportation networks. However, you are more than a Rail Baron in this game—not only do you haul the commodities but you control building and selling them as well. With over 50 commodities made from 11 raw materials, the game imposes few restrictions. There are nine industries ranging from toys to jewelry to printing presses that allow the player to pick their market niche and make a go at proving they've got what it takes to rise to the top. Overlay that with geographical considerations and the choices are almost endless.

The game's free-form option excels at providing the player with a chance to build sprawling financial empires that span the country. Once the money starts to flow in, there are no limits and massive industrial complexes spring up with the click of the mouse, while mighty mountain peaks are leveled to make room for new retail stores. The game shines in this regard, allowing the player to build an empire starting in 1960 and continuing on for a full century, with the included editor allowing for customized worlds. Watching your brand new car dealership turn a profit will bring a smile to even the hardest CEO's face. For the senses, rich graphics and catchy music compliment the thrill of construction as your economic juggernaut rolls towards fortune. The algorithms for the transportation side of the game seem fairly thorough and only on occasion do trains get hopelessly confused or trucks get caught in permanent traffic jams.

Outside of the free-form game option, *Industry Giant* comes with a handful of scenarios and a campaign game formed of several contracts (read missions). The campaign challenges the player to figure out how to earn enough cash before time is up. Each successful contract results in gaining a number of votes from the Board of Directors to get elected Chairman. Unfortunately, in the campaign game each mission is independent and there is no carryover from one contract to the next. The scenarios feature competition coming from the AI's ability to build as fast as your computer processes, which is appreciably faster than humans can point and click. The challenge is more acute since the military axiom of "first with the most" is doubly true in economic warfare.

The game focuses on efficiency with ruthless exclusivity. In this regard, the game promotes its own biggest flaw—the massive amounts of micro-management required. Each factory and retail store requires periodic tweaking of incoming raw materials or price so that the finished products don't just pile up in the stockroom. It's ridiculous that the player is expected to lay out strategic business plans while constantly ensuring that the number of bicycles being sold in Store #127 isn't getting out of hand. It's hard to imagine Bill Gates checking every morning to make sure that each Wal-Mart store has the appropriate number of Windows 95 upgrades. Another facet of *Industry Giant* that screams for improvement is the player's lack of influence on raw materials production. You can buy every piece of lumber that a mill produces for 10 years in a row and they still won't increase output, no matter what price. Finally, stealing market share from a competitor is possible but tedious and oftentimes you find yourself resorting to more direct techniques such as bulldozing an opponents' cities or buying them out.

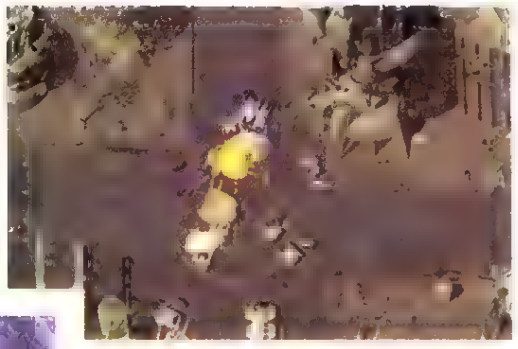
Industry Giant shines like a flawed gem, its beauty tempered by its imperfections. As a die-hard cutthroat business sim the game falls short of the mark, but as an empire builder it's definitely worth a look. If you're into hands-on management and want to control every detail this game will satisfy your need to meddle.
–Dan Waldeck

★ ★ ★ ½

Industry Giant
Interactive Magic • www.imagicgames.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90 MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

Total Annihilation: The Core Contingency

Cavedog Entertainment scoops a winner



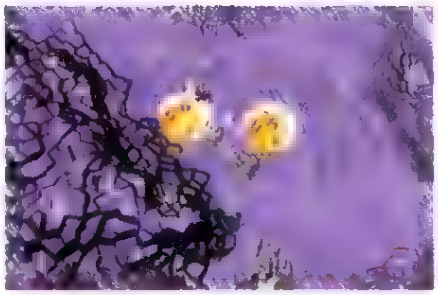
▲ Showdown with a Krogroth

◀ Purple haze: Battle on crystal world

You knew it had to happen. You don't make a game with *Total Annihilation's* clout then leave it—downloadable units aside—on the marketing vine to wither Obviously, Cavedog knows a gold mine when they see one. Furthermore, they intend to mine that shiny yellow stuff with the same fervor with which a Metal Extractor assaults a pool of metal.

The Core Contingency is Cavedog's first scoop from the mine, and an excellent offering it is. These are the days of add-on packs, and this one need bow to none. The CD bulges with extras. There are 75 new units, some of which can be downloaded from Cavedog's web site. Although these reinforcements span the spectrum of land, air, and sea warfare, they have—with a couple of notable exceptions—a decided nautical flair.

Both Arm and the Core get new naval units, Seaplanes, and naval structures such as Advanced Torpedo Launchers, Floating Dragon's Teeth (does anyone use these?), and buoyant laser and anti-aircraft towers. But those are not the only Waterworld extras;



Cavedog has thrown a whole new class of units into the mix: the Hovercraft. Part seaplane, part anti-grav vehicle, these are nifty, if not downright necessary, for navigating some of the new planets.

But landlubbers need not despair; there is plenty to keep you grinning. You can now deceive your carbon-based lifeform opponents with Decoy Commanders and protect your base with minelayers capable of seeding the battlefield with six types of mines. All this pales, however, in comparison to the Krogoth. A Core unit standing five times taller than a Commander, this bad boy is the Godzilla 'Mech of the *Total Annihilation* universe

But *Core Contingency* isn't just about units Loading the CD will pop 50 new multiplayer maps, 25 missions (12 Arm, 12 Core and a special Krogoth level), and six new worlds onto your hard drive. And better still, the long awaited mission editor finally makes roll call.

In all, an add-on that any company can be proud of, and any *Total Annihilation* gamer will love. Cavedog's first scoop into the mine has turned up more than gold; it has pulled out a gem. *–Mark H. Walker*

★ ★ ★ ★

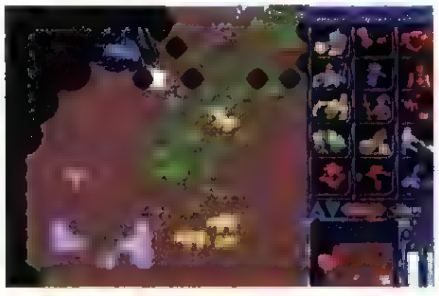
Total Annihilation: The Core Contingency
Cavedog Entertainment • www.cavedog.com • Requirements: Total Annihilation • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

Rise of the Shadowhand

What should have been in the original game

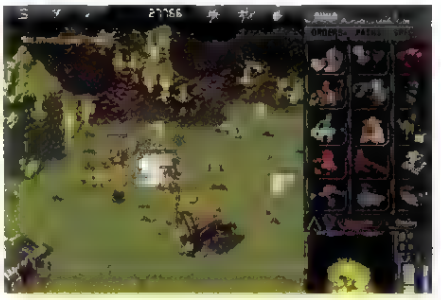
In the rush to meet release deadlines, a new strategy is being born for computer games in all genres. Instead of making a complete, well rounded initial product, companies now postpone features for the obligatory expansion pack. Such is the case with *Dark Reign* and its first addition, *Rise of the Shadowhand.*

Shadowhand has all of the standard expansion pack features. New units, maps and cut scenes are provided for the player's delight. What stands out is that the new features are not simply rehashed versions of old ones; they are complementary. A weakness in the original was poor AI; this has been improved in single player *Shadowhand.* Instead of trickling troops into an attack, the computer will attack suddenly and with force, although defensive prowess is still lacking. Also, the nonexistent original plot line is now, well, existent. The story starts with a Freedom Guard ship fleeing through a wormhole to a distant part of the galaxy. In a fight to survive, they must battle alien life forms as well as Imperium forces. The missions are unique and highly integrated into the plot, unlike the loosely coupled, unrelated battles we first saw. They are still merely a linear succession of canned maps, but the execution shows great improvement.



Semi-intelligent alien creatures can be used as weapons

Another nice feature is the addition of unique units. Players have the capability to control alien life forms and use them in battle. Other features include units capable of powering down enemy buildings and terraforming terrain for faster movement or building foundations. The new units aren't just more clutter for your build screens; they are often essential elements of one's force. Also, a minor improvement to the engine has been added: terrain can now be pockmarked by explosions. The effect is more than cosmetic; units will struggle across badly cratered landscape.



Swarms of aliens can overwhelm the strongest defense

Rise of the Shadowhand provides players with a lot the original game lacked. Instead of just an online platform, we now have an engaging single player environment. It is not revolutionary or spectacular, but it does flesh out the game substantially. Had the base product included these new features, it undoubtedly would have fared much better at the hands of its reviewers. *-Ryan Brush*

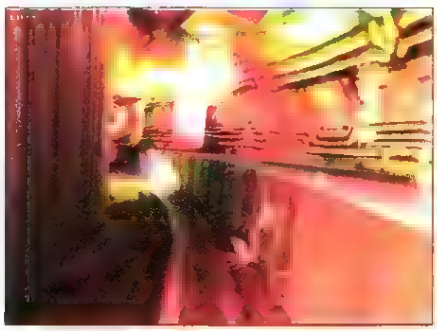
★ ★ ★ ★

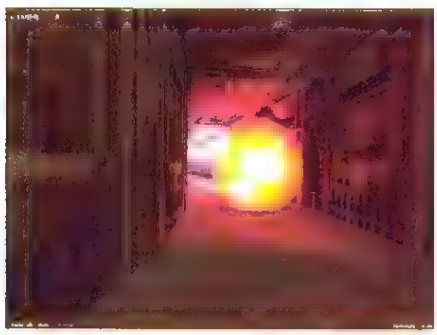
Dark Reign: Rise of the Shadow Hand
Activision • www.activision.com • Requirements: Dark Reign • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

Forsaken

There's Descent-ion in the ranks

(clockwise from right)
Overcrowding is a problem even in the wasteland
Hope that wasn't important
Some of the environmental hazards are quite, um, cool
100% chance of spark showers
The death scene. Get used to it





"We've got to quit thinking with our guns," Pike tells his aging band of outlaws after a bloody bank heist in the *Wild Bunch*. The same goes for those of us who used to send little kids crying home to mommy after kicking their prepubescent asses in *Street Fighter*. What sad times are these, when aging gunfighters who once dominated those hulking machines in the labyrinthine depths of mall arcades can no longer out twitch those clinical-looking little boxes on their desks? And where the hell are my argyle socks, dadgummit?

No question, Acclaim's *Descent*-style shooter *Forsaken* is hard enough to deter gamers who might otherwise find spiraling through typically creepy subterranean environments on a hoverbike a worthwhile pastime. Hordes of hostile robots, a few nasty puzzles, level time limits, lack of an automap and the disorienting nature of the true 3D environments can sour the experience even on the lowest difficulty settings. Replay value is minimal, as there is no level editor, and the lack of a compelling story—players are essentially anarchists looting the ruins of a wasted Earth in a series of unrelated missions—and shamelessly derivative gameplay make for a title that tarnishes rather quickly.

On the technological front, *Forsaken* is astounding. The stunning Direct3D-powered graphics achieve a smoothness and clarity usually only seen in titles powered by GLIDE or OpenGL, with real-time colored lighting, lens flares and cool special effects like sparks and falling boulders that churn at high framerates even on relatively mediocre Pentium systems. It's no coincidence the game has become a CPU and 3D-card benchmark standard.

Control setups are also magnificent, providing an intuitive interface through which you can assign virtually any imaginable configuration, including multiple actions to single buttons, to most popular controllers, rudder pedals, throttles and even force feedback devices. Other game designers could learn a lot from designer Probe's work in this area.

But it's not surprising that a game which so proudly flaunts its technology is almost totally devoid of personality. Most of *Forsaken*'s ideas, right down to the shield and hull counters, weapons and power ups, are ripped straight from *Descent*. Most of the environments are largely indistinguishable from each other and at times feel like those of *Quake II*. There are some nice touches (a downed plane and a live reactor, for example) but these accouterments are too few and far between.

The cast is also weak. The 16 different bikers available to the player, each with rigs rated in terms of speed, acceleration, shield and hull strength, and handling, are flat stereotypes that as characters are less memorable than the anarchist wackos in, say, *Carmageddon* or Lucasarts' adventure *Full Throttle*. Enemy robots and tanks aren't exactly thrilling, either, as they follow preset patrol routes and quickly forget about you when you vanish from their sight. To compensate, rooms are often stuffed with baddies, and picking up a key or powerup may cause several more to teleport in.

The multiplayer options are mixed. The game provides a lot of welcome features, like the ability to alter packet size to decrease bandwith consumption and ping intervals to other participants. This complements team play, deathmatch, capture the flag and bounty hunt (find the gold bars hidden on the level and hold on to 'em as long as possible) games. However, there are no true cooperative-play options and the setup screen doesn't show the game type or number of participants involved, meaning you have to join a game to find out what's going on. The TCP/IP module also lacks the more elegant client-server model used by *Quake* and others, so setting up a game over the Internet can be problematic. But once you get it running, multiplay is quite smooth and violent.

Ultimately, *Forsaken* is worth it only to those who can't wait for *Descent III*. Sure, the initial plunge is a heady experience—you start the game, get your bearings...up is down...no, down is up, no, wait...the room is spinning.. then you wake up three days later with a Tickle Me Elmo in a dumpster behind a 7-11 in Reno. Once you're back to solid food, however, you realize you're dealing with another mediocre shoot-em-up hiding behind some lovely, er, graphics. Lame marketing tactics aside (there are only *eight* revealing pictures of the magazine ad model in the included *nine* month calendar.. what a ripoff), *Forsaken* is a formidable display of technology that will bore everyone but the most dedicated action fans once its "wow" factor has dissipated. *Geoff Stratton*

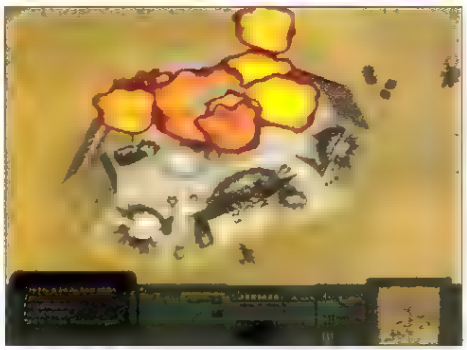
★ ★ ★

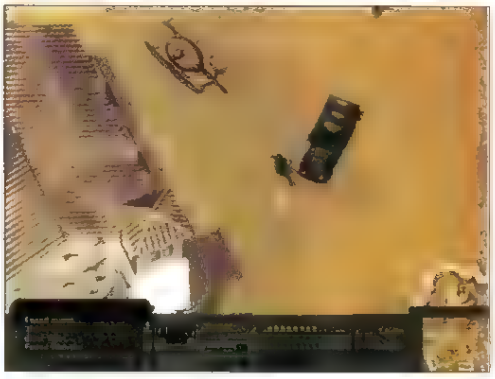
Forsaken

Acclaim • www.acclaimnation.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 166MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM Multiplayer: 2-16 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

Army Men

You're in the big—er, little—leagues now





Clash of the titans

Incoming!

War is hell ¼ just ask the guy without a head

Is that a turret, or are you just happy to see me?

Remember those little green plastic army men? You know—the ones that didn t bend at the joints, didn't have a *Star Wars* tie-in broke in half if you stepped on them (or even looked at them wrong) and seemed to disappear under the couch every time you turned around? These were the toys you burned, melted, blew up or fed to the cat. They were also, in all likelihood, the toys from your collection that required the most imagination. To transform a cheap plastic brigade of frozen green figures into the hell raisingest platoon this side of the Howling Commandos demanded serious creative participation (unlike, say, Transformers or most modern action figures).

If, by chance, you don't remember, never fear: the army men generation has come of age, and they'll be filling you in soon enough. This summer *Small Soldiers*, a Spielberg/Dante movie featuring the little green guys—sort of *Toy Story* on acid—is coming to a multiplex near you. And this spring *Army Men*, an action/strategy game featuring the same, has come to your PC.

Army Men, at first glance, doesn't look much like an action game. What it looks like is an exercise in real time strategy. You've got your isometric terrain maps, your air strikes and your recon flights, your paratroops, and your deployable platoons of soldiers. Strategy is certainly required by the game, but it's a humble type of strategy when compared to the heavy hitters of the genre. Only the function keys and number pad are used on the keyboard, for example, and missions are broken down into easily-digestible objectives (intercept a spy, assassinate an enemy commander, rendezvous at certain coordinates). The surprise is how much action *Army Men* delivers—plenty, and in spades.

You control Sarge, a character who incorporates all the various old army men poses into one neat package. At different times Sarge runs, kneels, and lies prone (although, disappointingly, he doesn't elbow his way through the muck while lying prone). He brandishes rifles, bazookas, mortars, grenades, flame throwers, mines, and radios, morphing effortlessly into the correct posture for each. He drives tanks, jeeps, half-tracks, and cargo trucks. He occasionally calls out orders to his back up squad or his air support, but more often than not this is a one man show. Sarge skirmishes, ambushes, lays siege, and creeps from cover to cover all by his lonesome. More Ahnold, one might say, than Army.

Action hounds can solve many of the game's problems simply by jumping in and shooting like a crazed weasel, but there is almost always an easier way, and that's where the strategy comes in. If you'd rather not try to take out a dozen hostile tanks at once, a little forethought can collapse a few walls and barricade them outside. By the same token, if you'd rather not get your hands dirty at all you can dig in somewhere and just call down a few air strikes. A combination of brain and brawn usually works best, but the determined pigeon holer can get by with mostly one or the other.

Army Men is great fun, if a tad repetitive (the relative simplicity of the game means that you'll see most of the elements, armored vehicles excepted, pretty early on). The sensation of demolishing a town single-handedly (or with a little help) may not be very realistic, but anybody who was raised on action movies will appreciate it nonetheless. Although challenging at times, the game tends more towards ease of play then real formidability. Three different terrain types (desert, alpine and bayou) provide the backdrops for twenty-eight missions. There are also unique multiplayer maps, which can be accessed and enjoyed with friends through HEAT.NET (www.heatnet.com).

If *Army Men* fails anywhere, it is in its effort to conjure a world reminiscent of those little green plastic guys. Yes, when soldiers are shot they fly apart in an explosion of parts (with no blood); and yes, when tanks flips over they look vaguely like toys. But only vaguely—if you didn't know that the game was supposed to be about miniatures, you could easily think it was about real soldiers. Not a big problem, obviously, especially since the gameplay is so accessible and satisfying. *Army Men* is so easy and fun that, yes, even a grown-up can play it. *John Altman*

★★★½

Army Men

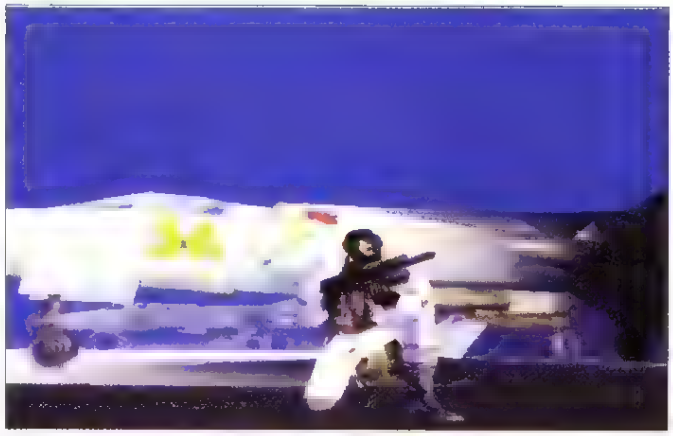
3DO • www.3do.com • Requirements: Windows 95; Pentium 90, 2X CD-ROM, 16 MB RAM Multiplayer: 2-4 players, Internet, LAN

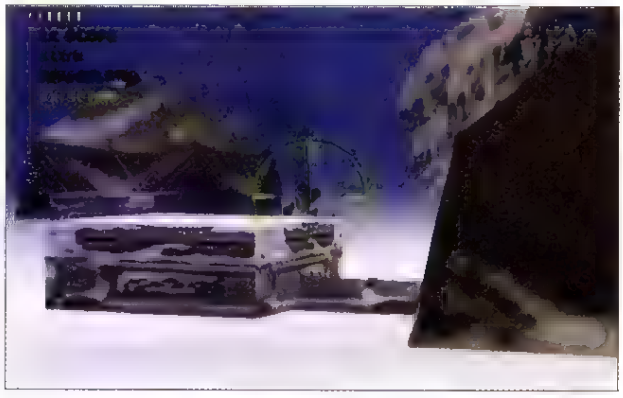
Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way

...and use up ammo like it's going out of style

It's about time someone revisited Electronic Arts' venerable *Seal Team*. This overlooked gem used a first-person engine to simulate Navy Seal missions. It distinguished itself from first-person shooters by modeling contemporary combat in all its lethality, requiring stealth and actual small-unit tactics. Running headlong into the action with guns-blazing, *Doom*-style, was the quickest way to fail a miss on.

Zombie's *Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way* is very similar, but it suffers from a few too many concessions to action gamers (not to mention a name that makes it sound like an optometrist sim in which Rangers are used as guide dogs). Rather than using this nifty 3D engine for more over-the-top *Quake* shenanigans, the developers have chosen something half way between James Bond and Audie Murphy.





clockwise from left

Rangers guard the plane

Rangers wonder, "Are we in the right game?"

Rangers melt the ice

Rangers draw a bead

For starters, the small-unit tactics are severely limited by two-man teams. This would have worked better if the game emphasized stealth, but it's almost always a matter of a head-on gunfights through the enemy's ranks. By the time a mission is accomplished, the kill tallies are absurdly high, considering that you were going up against dozens of well-armed and forewarned enemies. It helps that the enemies don't react very intelligently. They're either randomly crouching, crawling, and rolling, or they're sitting motionless waiting for you to pick them off from a distance. They don't seem inclined to take cover, so the suppressive effect of gunfire is missing. It also helps that they don't know how to use their grenades.

The way inventory works is also trapped halfway between a serious game and an action game. For each mission, you choose team members based on their limited equipment. But as you play, you can pick up additional stuff to your heart's content. There are things lying around that may as well be twirling in the air, not to mention the stuff left behind when you kill someone. Better hurry, though, as goodies disappear with bodies.

The mission structures lean more towards action, too. There's no good intel when you begin a scenario, so you'll probably play through a few times to get a feel for the layout. Then, when you're ready to try in earnest to beat the mission, you'll have to race against the clock. It wouldn't be so bad if the time weren't cut so close. This often makes careful tactics, like sniping and use of cover, impractical.

But once you accept the compromise between a serious tactical sim and an action game, you'll find that *Spec Ops* is an excellent variation on the first-person shooter. There is a good variety of mission types and environments, some interesting inventory items, and a smooth keyboard-based interface.

Although the sixteen missions make for a pretty short game, they're spread through five distinct environments, complete with their own gameplay twists and distinctive looks. From the snowy winds of Korea, to the Columbian rains, to the dusty streets of Afghanistan, *Spec Ops* is a lovely globe-hopping adventure, with exquisitely detailed foliage and sounds. Your Rangers even wear different outfits and get new options for weaponry as they progress.

The game makes excellent use of modern toys like night vision goggles, timed explosives, and sighting scopes. The transition as you lift a scope to your eye to shoot is very well done. There's even a laser sight that paints a dot on the actual terrain (it's bigger when it hits something in the foreground), as opposed to *Quake II*'s single red pixel. But an auto aiming routine will hit your target if you just fire in the general vicinity, so there's not much need for a laser sight. Grenades can only be thrown at a pre-set distance and trajectory, so they're rarely convenient. They're also prone to catching even the slightest corner or elevation change, leading to embarrassing self-inflicted wounds. Although all weapons are immediately lethal to your targets, they're nicely distinguished by firing rates and ammo load-outs.

As long as you understand that *Spec Ops* isn't really going to approximate Rangers in the field, you'll be in for a hoot and a half. In fact, the paintball promo included with the game is a good indication of what you're in for: lots of crawling on the ground, running from tree to tree, shouting orders at your buddy, and spraying virtual gunfire. In fact, if the sound effects weren't so good, you might end up making shooting noises as you play. *–Tom Chick*

★ ★ ★

Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way

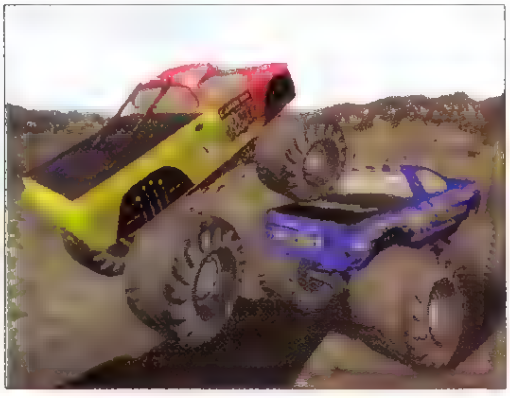
Ripcord Games • www.ripcordgames.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 166MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

Monster Truck Madness 2

This here sequel done got a case of yee-haw vu

Monster Truck Madness 2 is more method than madness. It s the typical safe approach to a sequel: take the same ol' game engine, upgrade it with a few new tricks, slap a Roman numeral on the box and watch it sell. Whoops, this is for the low brow crowd, so let's make that an Arabic numeral. We don't want Wal-Mart flooded with people looking for *Monster Truck Madnesses 2-10*. [*See, the Roman numeral for 2 is II, which could look like 11... ah never mind... –ed*]

The new tricks are moderately impressive, particularly at night, as there are some stunning nighttime graphics and an amusing underwater effect (blub blub blub). Each of the game's eleven tracks can effectively become an entirely new course with the addition of darkness, snow, rain or fog. The occasional "dynamic" element like a train or a blimp is interesting, but interactivity is still limited to the thrill of knocking over traffic cones. This sequel runs a little smoother than its predecessor and the graphics are more detailed although they still have that flat Direct3D look as if they were cut out of pastel construction paper



Mommy, what are those trucks doing?

The driving physics are identical to the first game, which means it still feels like you're racing indestructible plastic cars on marshmallow tires in an ethereal low-G environment. The truck configuration options are just as limited as they were in the first game. Winning races is still all about finding shortcuts and bumping someone off course

Unfortunately, the stadium events are now missing. In their place are Summit Rumbles, multiplayer-only arena battles in which you have to butt the other trucks off a hill. Interesting concept, but the slightest lag kills any sense of inertia there's nothing like a little stutter to break up a charge. And after your target has warped two truck lengths to the right, you'll find yourself barreling over the edge of the hill at full speed Multiplayer races are still a hoot, though

Hey buddy, your brights are on!

Monster Truck Madness 2 is the same cheesy superficial, arcade racer it was last year—consider this a graphics upgrade with some new tracks and leave it at that. *–Tom Chick*

★ ★ ★

Monster Truck Madness 2

Microsoft • www.microsoft.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 133MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players internet, LAN, modem, serial

Swarm

Can we ever truly destroy that alien brood?

Intense arcade shooters have become rare things these days. Now comes a strong entry that goes a long way to resurrecting the cyber warrior... and in homage to its predecessors, slay him again. And again. And again

Swarm casts the player in the role of Rawl Masteson, a convict in a future world where sentences may be commuted in return for service in the Praulac Nebula, a sector of space filled with both a valuable resource mineral called EZT and the predictably stingy alien race known as the Clagnor. The Clagnor are out for blood and so are you

Played from a top-down perspective, the world is sprite based. There aren't any fancy 3D accelerator effects or requirements, and the fact that the game is comfortably playable on a 133MHz Pentium is commendable, especially when beholding the sheer number of entities and projectiles

The far too rare swarmer missile in action

This game has only one serious flaw. *Swarm* recreates the typical arcade shooter experience far too completely. Any player will ultimately amass a considerable stock of lives (spare ships)—unfortunately, they're almost totally useless because all of the weaponry you acquired up to that point is completely lost when your current ship is destroyed. Gone Death after level 30? Restart This is certainly a patchable situation... players should lose a portion of their stores, not all of them. One additional criticism *Swarm* needs both more enemies and missions types (besides merely collecting the EZT or cleansing a sector)

Lapsing Ninja reflexes

Hopefully Reflexive will continue development of this powerful action engine. If you have the stamina and a yearning for what could be best described as a cross between *Star Control 2* and *Sinistar*, try *Swarm*. *–Scott Hunter*

★ ★ ★ ½

Swarm

Reflexive Entertainment, Inc. • www.reflexive.net • Requirements: Windows 95 or NT 4.0, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM • Multiplayer: None

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GIP804

Might and Magic VI

Real role-playing makes a triumphant return

Fueled in part by the success of Blizzard's *Diablo*, we're seeing the re-birth of the once moribund role-playing genre. While the merits of classifying that particular game as an RPG can be debated until the orcs come home, its enormous sales caused every company to finally drag out those designs that had been collecting dust for the past few years.

We've seen a few sporadic releases litter the post-*Diablo* landscape—an excellent *Fallout*, an unfortunate *Descent to Undermountain*. However, the group of series that once defined the genre on the PC—we're talking mainly about the *Ultima*, *Wizardry* and *Might and Magic* trio—have remained conspicuously absent. Until now. We'll see a new *Ultima* and *Wizardry* in the near-future, but today we have *Might and Magic VI: The Mandate of Heaven*, a near-classic from New World Computing. Only its weak narrative—especially a wimpy *dénouement* that is only a few steps above the legendary "drop to DOS" in the original *Eye of the Beholder*—and an occasional lack of polish keep the game from being the sort of transcendent gaming experience we associate with past classics. Instead, we're merely left with a superb game that delivers hours upon hours of entertaining hack 'n' slash role playing.

People expecting a revolutionary product may be disappointed as the game doesn't really innovate or toy with the formula established in previous versions of the series. It's essentially *Might and Magic III* with a free scrolling engine, which isn't necessarily a bad thing—past versions of the series are much beloved by old-time gamers. Besides, there's plenty more for them to love in this version.

▲ **Another example of the game's bizarre sense of humor. This guy sounds like Apu from The Simpsons**

◀ **The Temple of Baa is one of the game's weird jokes**

Cultural insensitivity alert—the cannibals are an unfortunate stereotype ▼

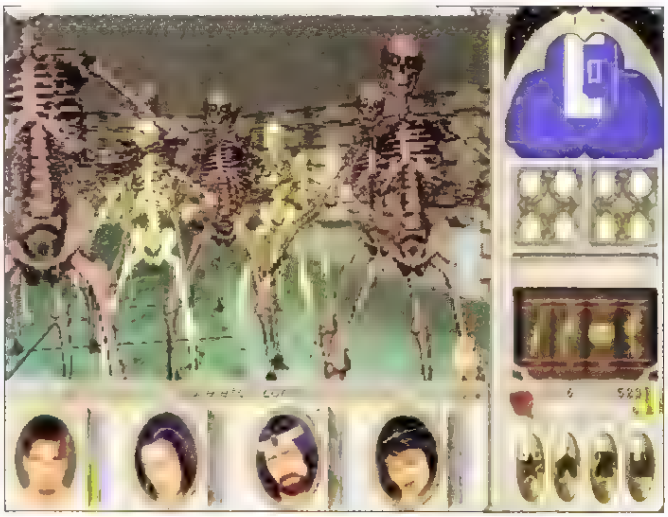
The game once again takes place in the world of Enroth and picks up where the last *Heroes of Might and Magic* strategy game ended. The kingdom of the missing in-action Roland Ironfist is in tatters, and the people are starting to question whether the heir to the throne, the child Prince Nicolai Ironfist, has lost the Mandate of Heaven to rule. It's up to you to assemble a party of four adventurers to span the countryside playing Boy Scout and FedEx man, completing various quests that eventually lead you to some sort of closure for the main story thread.

Unfortunately, the narrative is one of the weakest aspects of the game, never really engaging the player. Most of your time in the game is spent running irrelevant errands for the locals, which in the context of the game's fiction (you're trying to engender good will for the Ironfists) is perhaps easier to understand. These quests can be done in almost any order, making the game one of the most non-linear in recent memory. You'll want to spend the time running even the most innocuous of these errand quests, as you'll need the money and experience that serve as your reward. As an aside, those of you who insist on completing every single side quest in a game will be ecstatic to find that upon "completing" the game, you can continue playing to tie up any loose ends.

If you don't like combat, you'll definitely want to avoid this game. Many of the quests involve inordinate amounts of bestial slaughter, and some of it is incredibly challenging regardless of your skill level. The combat system, somewhat reminiscent of the SSI game *Thunderscape*, is definitely up to the task, being an excellent hybrid of real-time and turn-based. Unlike the SSI game, *Might and Magic VI* doesn't automatically switch you to turn-based at close range—all you have to do is press a key. In general, you'll find that you can dodge some long range attacks in real-time using near *Quake* like strafing, while switching in close combat allows you to target bad guys selectively. All in all, it's a system that works splendidly.

The game focuses on that RPG staple character development, which should please most fans of the genre. (In fact, it's likely you'll end the game with characters of levels well over 100.) Completing quests and slaying foul beasts gives you experience which allows you to train, and training gives you skill points to distribute amongst your party. Essentially, skills can be purchased, improved on via the application of

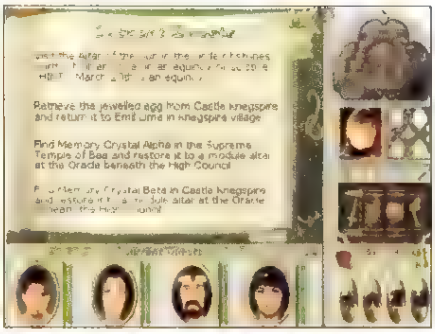
The party here has been at one too many, uh, parties



This is a bad situation—lots of skeletons, and almost everyone's unconscious

Now would be a good time to switch into turn-based combat mode

Meet Death. You'll be seeing him a lot


Retrieve the jeweled egg from Castle Kriegspire
and return it to Emil Lime in Kriegspire village
Find Memory Crystal Alpha in the Supreme
Temple of Bee and restore it to a module altar
at the Oracle beneath the High Council

The notes are occasionally too non specific. For example, which building is Emil Lime in?

skill points, and promoted to "expert" or "master." The six character types are limited in the type of skills they can attain, so you're best off with a balanced party. However, at some point in the game, your characters become powerful enough that it becomes less relevant whether you have a party of hybrids or specialists.

All of that character development produces a game of nearly unprecedented length. Ignoring any sort of mainstream pressure to produce a "light" RPG, New World has imbued *Might and Magic VI* with upwards of 100 hours of hardcore gameplay. If you judge an RPG solely by its length, as opposed to depth, of play, the praise lavished on last year's *Fallout* was probably due in large part to lowered expectations—years of mediocrity and neglect will do that to a gamer. Using that admittedly weak criteria, the 20 hours or so of gameplay found in *Fallout* doesn't compete at all with *Might and Magic VI*. That's a good thing—due to its lineage, it wouldn't have received the same break afforded *Fallout*, and would have been highly criticized for being too short. However, big isn't necessarily better playing the game can become a war against attrition, for your characters as well as yourself, as you navigate your way through the myriad of dungeons and landscapes.

Oh, and what dungeons and landscapes you'll see! Powered by two different 3D engines, the game has a look all its own, one that's likely to polarize gamers. It has cartoon-y graphics that are bright and whimsical where most like minded RPGs are dark and somber. The character portraits, from your own party members to the various NPCs (non-player characters) you encounter, eschew the hand drawn look of the previous series, opting instead for digitized humans that lack the character (no pun intended) of the other games. While they still animate when taking damage and change their facial expressions when diseased or cursed, they look goofy.

However, some of the indoor dungeons are breathtaking in their architecture, enormous in size (especially Kriegspire), and all have a unique design. The exterior scenes, while colorful and populated with monsters and NPCs (there are only two graphic representations of the latter) suffer from a rather severe case of draw in, or popping in and out, of distant objects (a problem exacerbated by the use of the "fly" spell). You can come up with a laundry list of technical glitches with the 3D engine – monsters getting stuck in corners, the occasional ability to shoot through a locked door, sorting issues with distant objects (sometimes objects or parts of them appear in front of things they're really behind)—but the biggest issue is its speed, or lack thereof. Due to low frame rates, the game is borderline unplayable in high resolution on a 200MHz Pentium with 64MB of RAM. However, the low frame rates aren't as big an issue as they would be for a reflex-oriented shoot 'em up.

Other minor issues include a non-mappable keyboard, quest notes that aren't specific enough, area maps that are so low-resolution in the zoomed in views that they're almost useless, and the lack of an annotated map to identify the various teachers that allow you to increase your skills. Outside of the keyboard mapping, these are fairly inconsequential omissions but would nonetheless be welcome additions to the next game in the series.

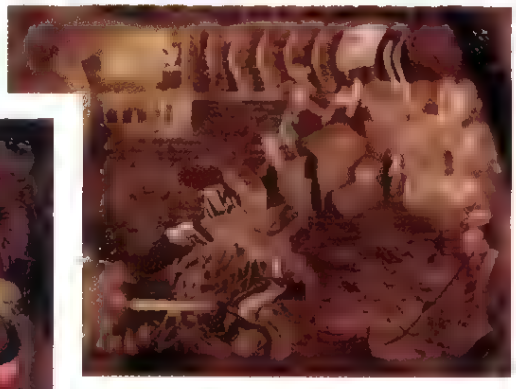
Even if you don't like the interface or find yourself taking notes and mapping, you'll still fight through to the end. Why this is the case is sometimes difficult to articulate, but despite any and all flaws, the game holds together marvelously. The big strength of the series has always been its beautifully crafted gameplay, and the sixth iteration hasn't lost that feeling that it's been lovingly created, to borrow another company's slogan, by gamers for gamers. A hundred hours later, you're bleary-eyed and sore-wristed, saying "Why did I play so long? Why do I like this game?" Ten minutes later you're saying, "So when's *Might and Magic VII* coming out?"

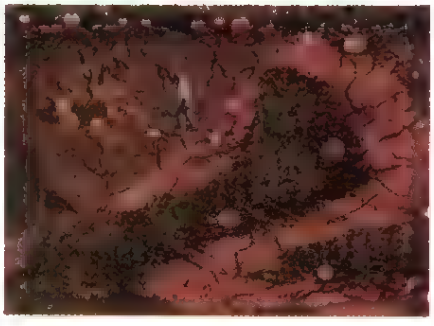
In the final analysis, there's no significant reason that fans of hardcore RPGs shouldn't make *Might and Magic VI* their current obsession. While you can nit-pick it to death, its total impact far exceeds the sum of its individual parts. Its only current competition are our memories of past glories. It's exactly the game *Daggerfall* tried to be, a sprawling epic of non-linear gameplay, and a wonderful throwback to the days of yore when role playing games ruled the roost. Welcome back. We missed you. *-Steve Bauman*

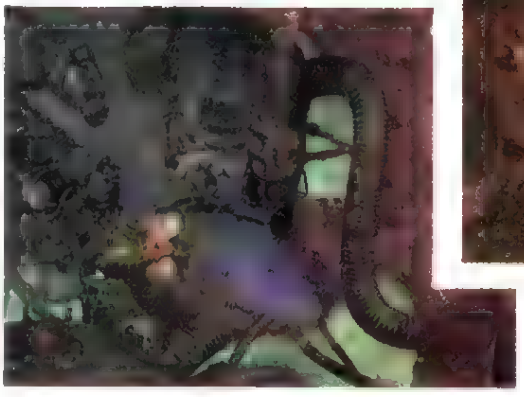
Might and Magic VI: The Mandate of Heaven
New World Computing • www.3do.com •
Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM
Multiplayer: None

Sanitarium

They're coming to take you away, ha ha







[clockwise from right]

Prozac nation

Haunted houses always have an attic

What lurks in the pumpkin patch?

One tip: don't eat immediately before playing

Stand-alone puzzles that really fit in the story

I locked the door to my apartment last night I rarely lock the door to my apartment. The last time I locked it was after watching *The Exorcist* a few years ago. I have a high tolerance for horror; lesser efforts fail to get through to me. Stephen King hasn't done it for half a dozen books now. Peter Straub never did it once Slasher flicks, even post modern efforts like *Scream*, don't so much as register on my radar. I can laugh off Cronenberg, chuckle indulgently at Sam Raimi's excesses, and take a shower directly after watching *Psycho*

But last night I locked my door—thanks to a computer game.

The game, *Sanitarium*, scared me. Deeply and profoundly. This accomplishment is all the more amazing because *Sanitarium* is an adventure game, with nothing jumping out from behind closed doors yelling "Boo!" *Sanitarium* scared me the old-fashioned way: with atmosphere, creepy characters, chilling music, and disturbing subject matter These various elements have been expertly combined by the folks at DreamForge Intertainment to create a game that produces more genuine scares than any other CD-ROM today—and, in the process, also leaves most modern horror fiction eating its dust.

The plot kicks off with a cut-scene detailing a mysterious scientific discovery and an equally mysterious car crash. The protagonist then wakes up in a gothic cathedral of a sanitarium, all inky shadows and phasing, half-real walls Stage left, a man pounds his head repeatedly against the stones, staining them with blood Stage right, a woman clucks like a chicken Center stage is you, the amnesiac patient, wrapped in bandages and plagued by the sen sation that you've seen this place before

Sanitarium delights in confusing reality with fantasy, memory with imagination, and percep tion with illusion. Over the next nine levels the story's hero bounces from one detailed paranoid fantasy to another, always ending up back at the sanitarium between "dreams." But why do all of his disparate fantasies, if wholly fictional, have so many elements in common? Pay close attention to the movies that pop up along the way; they represent fragments of your memory coming back, and, if they can be deciphered, the whole convoluted mess might start to make sense

Before you reach that point, however, you'll get to explore some of the more sumptuous virtual environments you've ever seen. Your first big detour takes you to a *Children of the Corn* style town, with the adults conspicuously absent (at least, the *living* adults) and the chil dren in thrall to an enigmatic force they call "Mother." The next presents you with a doomed circus island, peopled by miserable carnies who are being picked off, one at a time, by tremendous tentacles from the ocean. Other scenarios serve up an old fashioned haunted house, a crazy comic book world in which insects and Cyclops are being genetically com bined, and a halluc nogenic Aztec nightmare

Along the way your character morphs from an amnesiac patient to a litt.e girl to a four armed Cyclops/satyr But things keep coming back to the sanitarium, and, in particular, to a certain doctor who has been conducting certain unconscionable experiments. The pacing of the game is nothing short of remarkable, achieving a level of narrative tension rare y seen on the PC (*Bad Day on the Midway* is the only other game in recent memory that even comes close) This story actua ly holds together, developing steadi ly and logically. It avoids the campy kitsch of the *Phantasmagoria* series and the intellectual detachment of *7th Guest* and its offspring Most signif cantly, *Sanitarium* produces a real emo tional reaction wh ch is why my front door is still locked

A few small caveats. The plethora of cut scenes, while necessary for the backstory, tend to slow down the action The branching dia logue menus, while workable, can get extreme ly involved and therefore make the game seem occasionally talky. Finally, there are no red herrings in *Sanitarium*; if you stumble onto a mysterious machine, you'll always benefit by sitting down and tinkering with it.

These minor flaws are all but insignificant, however, considering the scope of what *Sanitarium* accomplishes. Stephen King once said that he recognizes terror as the finest emo tion, but f he can't get it, he'll go for horror or the gross-out. *Sanitarium* never lowers itself to a gross out for a gross-out's sake; everything here works in service to the overall effect. Even the stand-alone puzzles have been so shrewdly inte grated into the whole that you may not realize they're really standing alone *Sanitarium* deserves what may be the highest compliment any work of horror can merit. Make sure you p ay it but don't make the same mistake I did. Don't play it alone. *John Altman*

★★★★½

Sanitarium

ASC Games • www.ascgames.com

Requirements. Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB RAM, 4X CD ROM

Multiplayer. None

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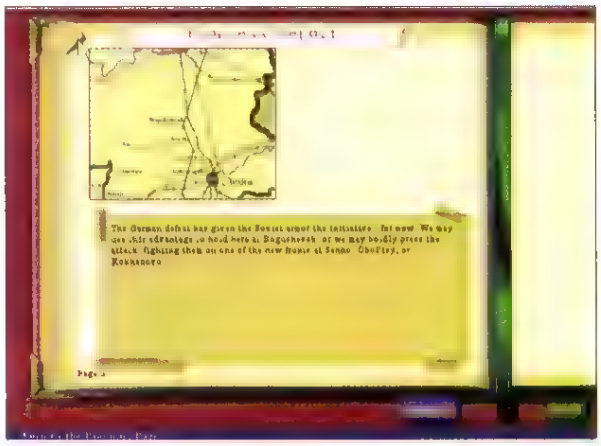
iPanzer '44

Interactive Magic drops a track



clockwise from r ght.

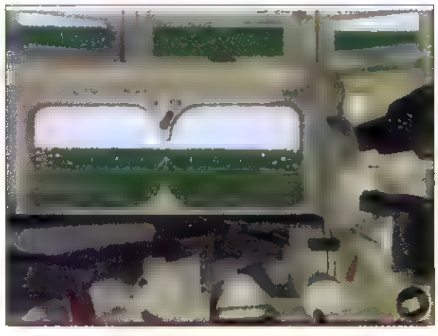
iPanzer44's dynamic campaign provides action on the Eastern and Western Front

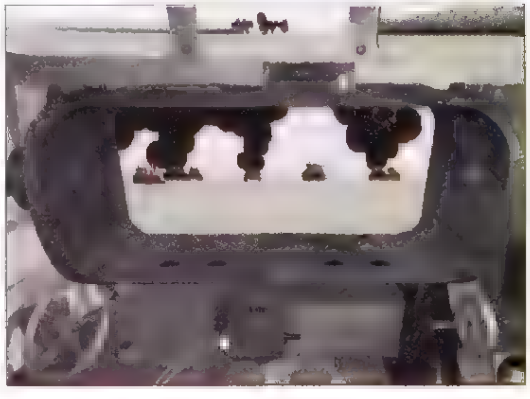
A Panzer platoon goes around the corner of a forest

The view from a Russian T-34/85 gunner's station

American Shermans are caught in a German killing zone

Far too often the AI controlled tanks mindlessly become stuck in the trees





While quite a few modern tank simulations have hit the shelves lately, would-be WWII tank commanders have been frustrated in their search for a sim that allows them to sit in the cupola with Patton, Zhukov, or Von Luck. Interactive Magic has made an attempt to fill this vacuum with *iPanzer '44*, a WWII tank sim that allows the player to lead German, American, and Russian armored forces. Unfortunately, this highly anticipated program is so filled with flaws that only a person who truly wants to experience the painful aspects of WWII armored combat should considered purchasing it

That's a shame, because the obvious intent of *iPanzer44* is precisely what WWII grognards have been looking for. The game allows you to command an armored company—as the Russians at the Eastern Front (Belorussia), as the Americans at the Western Front (Ardennes), or as the Germans at either of the aforementioned battlefields in single missions or dynamic campaigns. While much of the game may be played from a top-down tactical map, the real heart of the sim is the ability to play in first person mode from within the tanks. The player may assume the position of tank commander, gunner, or driver, and may jump from tank to tank as the situation requires. A range of realism options may be toggled, providing the ability to tweak the program from an arcade game to a serious simulation.

An issue many WWII armor aficionados may object to is the choice of tanks offered. In a deliberate design decision, Interactive Magic has chosen to only include the medium tanks: no heavies such as the Tiger. The reasoning given is that the heavy tanks were not the norm for the average tanker; the medium tanks were the true workhorses of the war. Thus, the only vehicles one may enter are the M4A3/76 Sherman (American), the T-34/85 (Russian), and the PzKw V Panther (German). As disappointing as this may be to many, the explanation is reasonable, and had the implementation been done well, the loss would not have detracted greatly from the game.

However, *iPanzer44* is full of problems that rob the player of any chance of an immersive experience. While the designers claim up front that they emphasized game play over eye candy, the graphics still are surprisingly sparse. Even in hardware 3D mode (supported through Direct3D), the woods and terrain look primitive on a 233MHz MMX machine with a 3Dfx video card. When a tank pops smoke, the result is an odd looking, non moving cone that is slightly larger than the tank. When the battle is joined, moving the turret can become sluggish if there are several vehicles involved, a deadly problem when one is in a race with an enemy tank to get in the first shot.

Worse than the graphics, and ultimately fatal to the sim, are the AI problems (and since no multiplayer is included, the AI is everything). The AI controlled tanks have absolutely no idea of how to move from place to place if obstacles of any type are in the area. In one battle, an entire tank platoon eliminated itself by driving directly into the woods, each tank ramming the woods and immediately becoming crippled. Almost every battle will find a vehicle becoming detached from its platoon due to its inability simply to go around a tree or dead tank. This results in the player being forced to micromanage every unit, making constant minuscule changes in their paths to keep them from crashing into woods, wrecks, or each other. It is infuriating to be in the midst of a well planned attack, with enemy tanks approaching, and find a vital platoon stuck halfway into the woods, engines running but immobile.

Pathfinding isn't the only evidence of AI deficiencies; battlefield brains appear to be lacking in the computer players. Often, enemy platoons of tanks can be attacked from their flank, with them simply sitting and taking fire without moving or attempting to return fire until destroyed Assaults by the enemy are invariably head on attacks, with platoon after platoon driving into killing fields and joining their dead comrades. Even when an enemy element is in perfect position to attack the flank of an engaged squadron, it merely sits and watches the action

The highly detailed manual and the dynamic campaign structure hint at what this game could have been. However, the combination of outdated graphics and an AI that simply can t figure out how to move or fight make *iPanzer44* a huge disappointment. *--Jeff Lackey*

★½

iPanzer44

Interactive Magic • www.imagicgames.com
Requirements: Windows 95, 133 MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB RAM, 4X CD ROM •
Multiplayer: None

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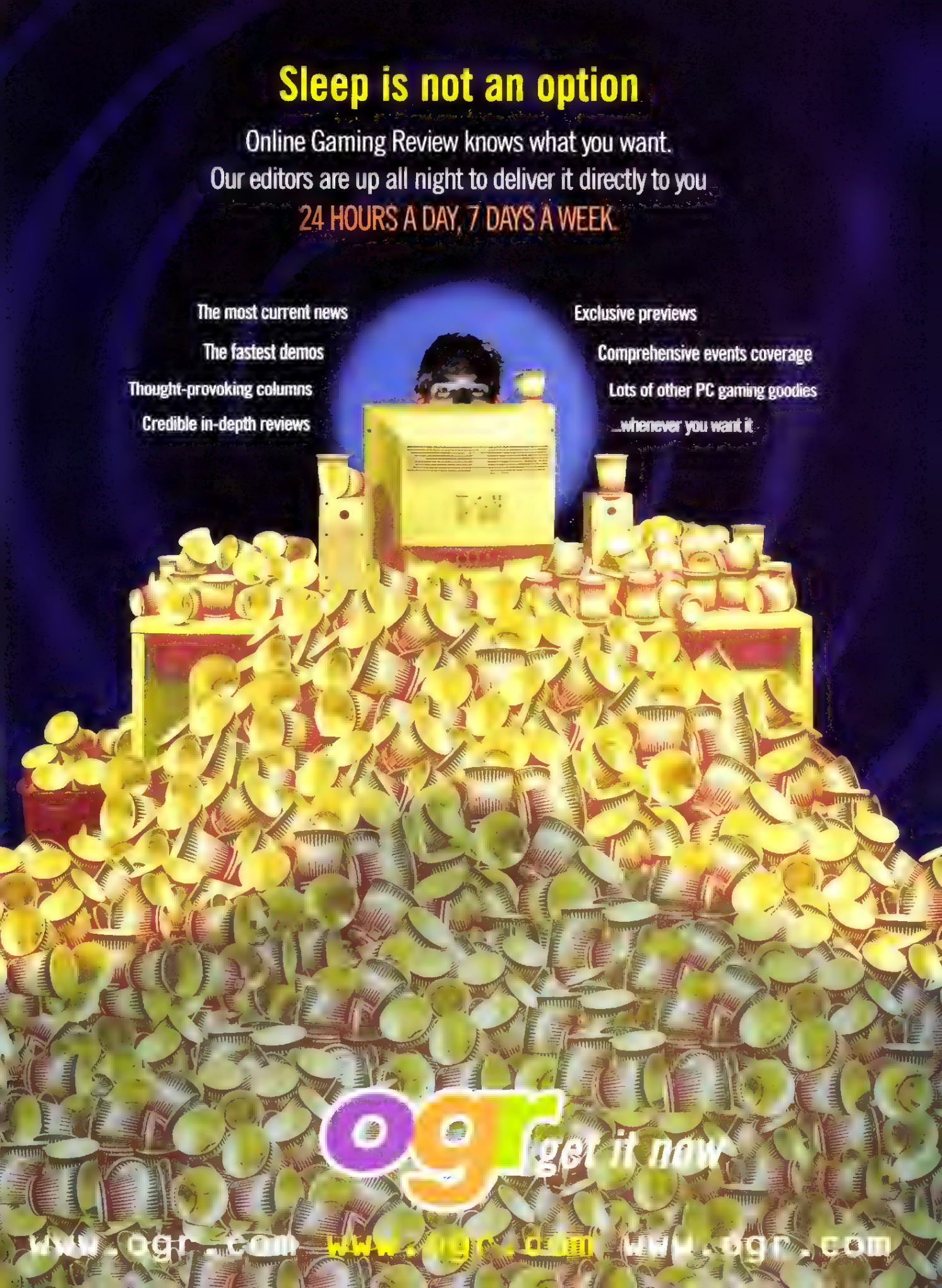

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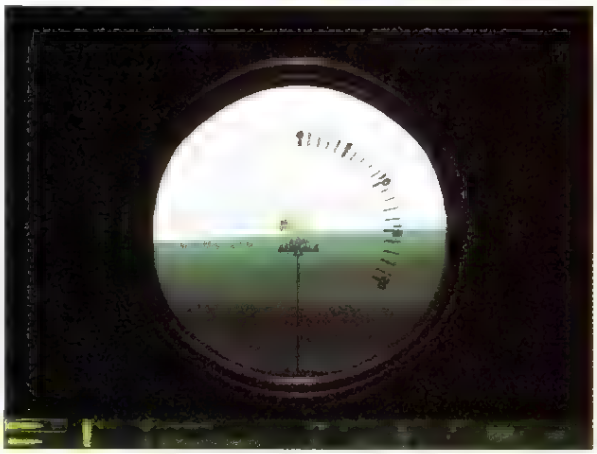
Panzer Commander

Bumbling Matildas, paper Tigers, and short-sighted Shermans

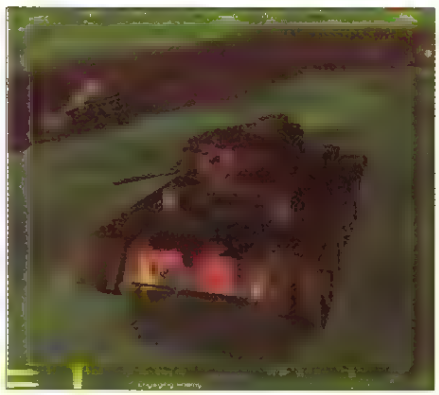
Panzer Commander will appeal to fans of World War II ground combat. Well, make that fans of WWII tank battles. Actually, let's just say it will appeal to guys who like looking at models of tanks. This is what *Panzer Commander* does best. If you built plastic models as a kid or if you like leafing through coffee table books of WWII hardware, you'll get some fleeting enjoyment from the game's detailed models of armored vehicles. From the squat boxy Czech Skodas to the shoulder-shrug tall, ill-fated Shermans; from the low, sleek Panzer IVs to Russia's forward-slung slope-nosed T-34s; from the imposing and majestic bulk of the Tiger and it's grand 88 to the odd cut angles of Britain's ponderous Churchill, *Panzer Commander* boasts an impressive array of vehicles, letting you drive and shoot the best and least of them. Although it's questionable whether the developers at Ultimation really needed to represent five variants each of the PzIII and PzIV and four of the Sherman, you can't fault them for giving us a sim with so many choices. In this regard, *Panzer Commander* is a unique and welcome addition.

▲ Me and my StuG



◀ One less gun emplacement

Destroyed vehicles are displayed with a lovely burnt umber and orange paint scheme ▼



Unfortunately, it seems that so much emphasis was put on these lovingly-rendered tanks that the rest of the battlefield was sadly neglected. The battle grounds are pretty sterile, with bitmapped walls for forests and scattered pretty boxes for buildings (rough terrain with variable elevations is nicely done, however). Air strikes and artillery are merely half hearted attacks on pre-scripted locations. Stalin called artillery the "god of war," but here it's little more than a few smokeless firecracker bursts. And aircraft, which should strike terror into the heart of any tank commander, are just an excuse to stick your head out the hatch and see if you can catch a glimpse of the airplane graphic (don't blink, it goes by fast). Infantry, arguably the most important component of warfare, is AWOL. There are supposedly a few grunts hunkered down in the game's fixed gun emplacements, but you won't find anyone in the houses, forests, or gullies. There's no fear of surprise Panzerfaust attacks from the rear or snipers picking off your commander. There's no reason to use HE shells on anything but sandbag emplacements. Unless you feel the need to bully helpless trucks, there's no reason to man the coaxial machine gun. World War II represented the coming-of-age of combined arms tactics in the history of warfare, but you'd never guess it by playing in *Panzer Commander*'s armor only arenas, where it looks like they gave a war and nobody but a handful of tankers came.

Since the game is basically a collection of tanks in a vacuum, the most important issue is how the tanks are modeled. And this is *Panzer Commander*'s undoing. The physics of the tanks in motion are cause for some early "gee-whizzes" with the way recoil, suspension, and inertia are modeled. But when it gets down the important stuff, the parts that go boom, there's something off kilter. It seems like there were some sincere and partially successful attempts to model the relative effectiveness of different weapons against different armor. Penetration power is clearly figured, as you'll see by plinking German shells off the sloping front armor of a T-34 or using the fearsome 88 to pick off tanks like fish in a barrel. But issues of targeting and accuracy are almost completely glossed over. Your platoon's gunners seem to have a suspiciously high hit rate, often flying in the face of weapon characteristics, extreme ranges, relative motion of shooter and target, and skill ratings. Although the manual makes it clear that firing while moving is a futile proposition, the computer gunners don't seem to have a problem with it. If you want to take matters into your own hands, simply align two crosshairs to set range and then point the gun, which rarely seems to miss once you've lined it up. Important variations in targeting equipment are reduced to different reticle styles. By omitting some of the most important factors in who kills whom and how and why, little touch-

es like turret traversal speeds, boresight elevation limits, and different trajectories for AP and HE shells are all but wasted

Although damage modeling is impressive at first glance (thrown treads, overheated engines, jammed turrets, and killed crew members are all included), there's something fishy here. If you use the scenario editor to run tests, you'll run into all sorts of little anomalies. For instance, in one shoot-out, an American Sherman's first shot would always damage a Tiger's gun while the second shot would always jam the turret. Occasionally some of the war's supposedly impervious tanks seem too vulnerable to smaller guns, "against all odds" kills are far too common while point blank shots sometimes glance harmlessly off rear armor

One of the most glaring omissions has to do with the graphics engine. Powerful guns routinely destroyed targets at ranges of 2 kilometers or more (the manual even mentions a Tiger's 88mm gun scoring a kill from 4.5 kilometers). But *Panzer Commander's* graphics start to haze over at about 800 meters, almost completely dissolving into vague lumps after a kilometer or so, even when you're looking though the telescopic gun sight. This sort of viewing limit is fine in a first-person shooter but it's unacceptable in a realistic tank sim because it effectively destroys the advantage of longer-ranged guns and better optics. It condenses the action and makes realistic desert scenarios all but impossible. *Panzer Commander* tries in vain to get around this by presenting ambushes amid hilly terrain or scenarios that start in mid-battle

Poor control over your platoon members, not to mention the friendly support elements that may be present in a mission, is another serious shortcoming, especially when you're up against more formidable armor. The Americans figured that it took six Shermans to destroy one Tiger, since they would have to outflank it to get a shot at its sides or rear. But there's no way to coordinate these sorts of vital tactics, making the game a head-to-head slugfest in which the biggest gun wins. Furthermore, the commands to assign targets to your platoon members are among the handful of documented commands that don't work. There is no good overview of your mission area or objectives, briefings are only dinky little chunks of text, without vital maps or lists of friendly units present or opposition expected. You'll often have to replay missions, dying a couple of times as you learn where the bad guys are and how to get around them within the assigned time limit. Because of this, *Panzer Commander* comes dangerously close to being an action game like *Mechwarrior*

The final rivet in the coffin is the AI, particularly the complete lack of pathfinding. Tanks have no regard for facing. If you can drive around behind a tank, it won't bother to turn its thicker front armor to you. Weaker tanks confronted with a more powerful gun won't close to killing range. Soft targets, on the other hand, will often make a bee-line right for you like a quarterback running towards the wrong end zone. It seems as if enemies have no AI aside from the waypoints hard-coded into the scenarios. Most aggravating of all is the way vehicles have no concept of going around obstacles. The greatest threat to your platoon is the perilous act of driving near buildings or among steep inclines. Many vehicles will be lost forever once they've butted up against a wall or mounted the foot of a slope they can't climb. *Panzer Commander* must be set in some alternate universe in which reverse gear has not been invented. This alone is almost enough to kill the game

Your own tank driver is as stupid as the enemy tanks; watch him burn out your engine because he's run into a damaged vehicle and can't figure out that he should go around it. There's no convenient way to skip waypoints and the autopilot function is inclined to wander off on its own. Luckily, the tank controls are pretty streamlined. It's a simple matter to drive in one direction, turn the turret in another, and turn your head to look in yet a third direction, even though the status bar is missing a useful indicator for these different facings. This status bar is otherwise pretty helpful, displaying important information no matter what view or station you're in (very much like what's commonly used in sub sims). Some coarse analog gauges are built into the interior graphics, but they seem like an afterthought; they're next to useless

One of *Panzer Commander's* accomplishments is that it keeps your butt in the actual tank rather than forcing your nose into a map screen while you play. In most ground sims you get the best situational awareness by fighting from the bird's eye view afforded by your map, which is anathema to the immersiveness of a sim. But *Panzer Commander* only offers a postage stamp-sized map in the commander's station that shows about a kilometer in each direction. Most of the tanks' stations are useful in one way or another to help you get your bearings. The external views leave your commander in danger of being killed by small arms fire, so there's incentive to button-up and use the limited view from the periscope. Furthermore, since the scope of the action is so limited, everything is manageable from the confines of your tank. With its superb sound effects and beautiful tanks, this could have been a remarkable simulation of armored warfare in World War II. If only

Well, there is a long list of "if only's" plaguing the fatally flawed *Panzer Commander*. Bugs can be forgiven. Poor AI can be forgiven (indeed it's almost expected). Missing features can even be forgiven. But it's a mystery how anyone would approve the assembled gaffs in *Panzer Commander* (especially the limited engagement ranges and complete lack of pathfinding). Sometimes a game can be fixed with a patch (witness MicroProse's *M1 Tank Platoon II*), but *Panzer Commander's* in need of a recall and overhaul. *Tom Chick*

The commander's buttoned down view

An 88 when it's angry

The commander's buttoned down view

There's about to be a new Sherman in town

★½

Panzer Commander

SSI • www.ssionline.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 133 MHz Pentium, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-6 players, Internet, LAN

Microsoft Golf: 1998 Edition

Taking a break from world domination to deliver a pretty good golf sim

Microsoft's golf sims in the past could be best described as "*Links* Lite" they were basically slightly modified versions of the venerable *Links* series. With *Microsoft Golf: 1998 Edition*, the series breaks from tradition by going with a design by Friendly Software, with the result being a blend of familiar features from other sims plus a number of original concepts

The first thing you notice about a golf sim is the graphics, and those in *Golf 98* are very nice. Only when compared to the top dogs of the golf sim world (e.g., *LinksLS 98, Jack Nicklaus 5*) do any deficiencies appear, such as the "black" water (although reflections are present). An insert window is available, configurable to display a top down view and/or a reverse shot view. One nine-hole course and three 18-hole courses are included, with each hole accompanied by an optional "fly by" intro. The sounds on the course wildlife, lawnmowers, planes, etc. are outstanding, although some sounds, such as the ball hitting the pin or the ball splashing into the water, seem to be missing. There is the obligatory commentator, in this case a droll personality with a rather dry wit. Ball physics seem to be pretty good overall, although the roll of the ball on the green seems slightly "off" hard to put a finger on, the roll of the putt just doesn't look completely natural. Something that is definitely not natural is the behavior of the ball on water: it will apparently roll across the water until it stops, then sink. Gameplay itself is a little slow while the redraw seems to be acceptably quick, the game forces players to wait a few seconds before swinging

[clockwise from right]

An optional "fly by" introduction is available for each hole

Player animations are very well done

Playing out of the deep stuff

Post shot graphs display the trajectory of your shot

For many, the swing interface makes or breaks a golf sim. *Golf '98* offers the traditional 2- and 3-click options, then adds a couple of interesting choices. A "mouse swing" interface is available, with the player able to choose any axis of mouse movement desired for the swing Unfortunately, the swing is not real time: i.e., the player moves the mouse and when finished, the on screen player executes. This robs the interface of the direct connection to the on screen player that is the strength of this approach. The other option is a computer swing you click a "swing" button, and the computer does all the work (perhaps handy for allowing your small children to play with you) The traditional "click" interfaces work about like they do in other games, with the exception that short swings and putts use very little of the swing meter, thus requiring very fast reflexes to hit "on the nose." Other options for hitting the ball include a "spin" meter (although only side spin, and not top or back spin) and a "height" adjustment, for those low runners out of the woods or high flop shots over a green side bunker

Where the game shines is in its gameplay options. Included scoring styles include stroke, match, skins, scramble, and Bingo Bango Bongo (a popular betting game, provided here in all of its side bet glory). Setting up your player includes the ability to choose your overall skill level, your hitting style (e.g., fade, draw, high or low shot, etc.), and the length for each club in your bag. The same can also be set for computer players you create, as well as their aggressiveness and course management skills. While this is a great idea for creating computer "personalities," the effect on their actual play does not seem as significant as expected Ten player animations are available, including male and female of varying skin tones (sorry, no southpaws). These onscreen player representations are very smooth and lifelike (video captures, rather than polygon "cartoons"); however, for all of the customization allowed, they are disappointingly devoid of any type of comments or reactions during play. It detracts from the immersion factor when you make that rare hole in one and your on screen persona has no reaction at all ("Ho hum, just another ace. I suppose that means I don't get to putt this hole...")

Overall, while several nits one can pick keep it from being a *LinksLS 98* or *Jack Nicklaus 5* killer, *Microsoft Golf '98* is a pretty good golf game with some options the big guys don't yet offer *Jeff Lackey*

★★★½

Microsoft Golf: 1998 Edition

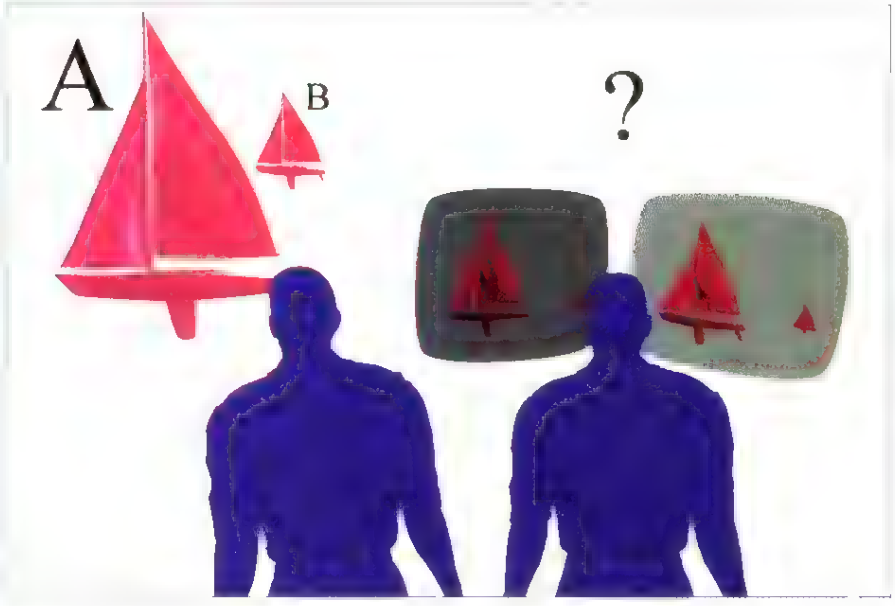
Microsoft • www.microsoft.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB of RAM, 4X CD ROM • Multiplayer: 2-4 players, Internet, LAN, modem

PHILIPS

Let's make things better

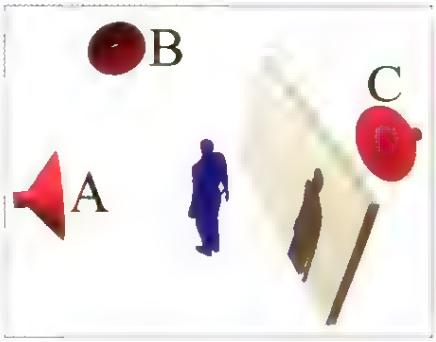
Reinventing Virtual Reality

What, how and why hardware is geared for immersion—Ben Sones



The man on the left senses that object A is closer than object B, and his eyes adjust focus accordingly. The stereoscopic display provides the man on the right with the same distance cues, but the objects are actually on the same focal plane (the screen). The discrepancy can cause visual confusion and eyestrain as his eyes attempt to focus on objects that he perceives as being closer or farther away

3D positional sound can create the illusion that these three sound sources exist in three-dimensional space



Towards the beginning of the decade it was the buzzword du jour—virtual reality. Environments so believable that the user would be completely immersed and forget that what they saw was merely an illusion. Many of the more practical conceptualizations of virtual reality hardware involved the participant strapping some sort of silly helmet on their head and climbing into a device resembling one of those cheesy cockpit jetfighter games that rocks and tilts when you pull on the joystick. Cumbersome as such setups may have seemed, there was little doubt that virtual reality offered loads of potential where electronic games were concerned. Those silly helmets became a reality in the form of a variety of VR headsets, but they have mostly failed to catch on with both developers and consumers. They now spend much of their time languishing on the shelves at the local computer store—a small legion of dusty virtual paperweights. At a glance, they would seem to give mute testimony to the impractical nature of the goal to immerse people in virtual worlds.

In truth, it is not the goal itself that was unrealistic, but rather our understanding of what it would take to reach it. "Immersion" is a subtle concept, and the elements that help a person buy into a virtual experience are difficult to pin down. Developers have not given up on virtual reality (despite what those dusty VR headsets might tell you); they have simply started to explore new ways to create immersion. It might surprise you to discover how far they have come…

Seeing is believing

VR headsets tend to be expensive toys, but cost is only one of the reasons why they have failed to become popular. It might seem obvious that a stereoscopic display (a device that reproduces the way we see three dimensional space by providing a unique image for each eye) would be the best device for creating an immersive virtual world. Strangely enough, that may not be true. Such displays sport resolutions lower than what a monitor can provide, and they present users with information that is inconsistent with real three-dimensional environments. The dual displays trick the user's brain into believing that it is seeing an actual three-dimensional space, but in reality all the objects in that space exist on the same focal plane. The user's eyes attempt to focus on objects that it incorrectly perceives as being closer or further away, and the result is visual confusion and eyestrain.

Hardware developers may or may not have picked up on these shortcomings consciously, but they have turned their efforts at creating visual immersion to other avenues. Studies from as early as the mid-'70s have suggested that other cues such as drop-shadows and heightened visual detail are more successful at creating immersion than a stereoscopic display. The proof is in the pudding, and the blazing success of the 3D-accelerator market provides almost more pudding than developers can eat. 3D accelerators provide more than enough immersion to justify their cost, and after playing an accelerated game like *Quake II* for a while, you almost forget that you are seeing this world through a 17" (more or less) window. A new generation of 3D chipsets is poised to hit the market, and offerings from 3Dfx (Voodoo2), nVIDIA (RIVA TNT), and S3 (Savage3D) will raise the bar by delivering even more features that heighten immersion.

The sound and fury

Audio is the neglected stepchild of virtual reality, but the advent of 3D positional sound may change that. Stereo and surround sound have been around for years, you might think, so why all the fuss? If you find the concept of 3D audio underwhelming, take solace in the fact that you probably are not alone sound is one of the most frequently overlooked elements in electronic entertainment.

Stereo, in simplest terms, pans a given sound between the left and right speakers to give the impression that the source of the sound lies in that direction. To replicate a sound source to the right of the listener, more of the sound would be piped into the right

speaker. Add more speakers to the equation and you have surround sound. Altering the direction that the sound is coming from by panning it between speakers mimics two important cues that humans use to localize sound. "Inter aural intensity difference" (or IID) refers to the fact that sound tends to be louder in the ear closer to the source, and "inter aural time difference" (or ITD) refers to the fact that a sound will arrive at one ear earlier than it arrives at the other. Stereo and surround sound work well with prerecorded audio, but when it comes to presenting interactive audio—such as you might encounter in a game of *Quake II*, for example—they have some drawbacks. IID and ITD cues allow us to place sounds only in a very general sense—we rely on other information to be able to localize sound sources more specifically. Environmental cues are especially important, and by interpreting the way a sound is altered as it reflects from or is obscured by surfaces around us we are not only able to place the location of the sound accurately, but also to determine the nature of our surroundings. A person speaking five feet to your left will not sound the same in an auditorium as he would outdoors, or on the other side of a brick wall. Prerecorded audio contains many of the environmental cues of the surroundings in which the sounds were recorded, but audio in interactive environments is synthesized on the fly. A stereo or surround sound rendering will give you sounds that are heedless of their surroundings—that Iron Maiden is going to sound the same whether she is standing next to you in a closet or in an amphitheater.

3D positional sound was conceived to address these concerns. Games that are written to take advantage of 3D positional sound calculate how the sound waves would actually travel through the game environment to the listener's ears and add the appropriate cues. Our illustration on the previous page represents a virtual environment in which sounds are emanating from three unique sources (A, B, and C). Stereo would render the location of each of the three sound sources by

Technology Preview

Better visuals

It is not a new piece of 3D hardware, but it does have the potential to improve on your current 3D performance. Multi-Resolution Geometry (or MRG) is a software acceleration technology intended to build on current 3D acceleration. The number of polygons it contains directly affects the speed with which a three-dimensional scene can be rendered. As objects become more distant, the need for high levels of detail lessens, but their polygons have to be accounted for by the rendering engine even when they take up only a few pixels on your monitor. Some 3D games work around this by rendering objects at several levels of detail and switching between the models as the object moves away from the viewer. Aside from increasing development time, this approach results in object "popping"—a noticeable jump when an object moves across the invisible boundary and switches to a different detail level. MRG proposes to eliminate this problem by providing "continuous level of detail." As objects become more or less distant, MRG adds or subtracts polygons one by one to produce a smooth scaling effect while minimizing the number of polygons the 3D engine has to handle. The MRG API works alongside any triangle-based 3D API (such as OpenGL, Glide, or Direct3D) and provides its scaling effect without requiring game developers to model objects at multiple detail levels. The SDK is available now from Sven Technologies—expect to start seeing titles supporting MRG by the end of the year.

Multi-Resolution Geometry
Sven Technologies, Inc.
www.sven-tech.com

altering the intensity of the sound in each speaker. Sound A would be louder in the left speaker, sound B would be equally loud in either speaker, and sound C would be louder in the right speaker.

3D positional sound would take the effects of the environment into account and alter each of the sounds accordingly. Sound A is still louder in the left speaker than in the right, but the sound would also echo off the wall to the listener's right. The same wall would muffle sound C. Sound B would produce less of an echo from the wall than sound A would. Sounds cues are continually updated as a sound's source moves in relation to the listener and objects in the environment. These effects can create an audio illusion of three-dimensional space even on two speakers—an illusion that reacts to a player's input Convincing 3D sound can bring as much immersion to a virtual experience as visual 3D acceleration can, and it may be that its time has finally come. Aureal has developed it's own set of standards for 3D positional sound (A3D, and the upcoming A3D 2.0), but the emerging standard (which Aureal also supports) appears to be Microsoft's DirectSound3D.

Technology Previews

The mouse that roared

If it sounds a little weird, that is probably because it is a little weird. A mouse is probably the last candidate you would expect to benefit from a force-feedback boost. Then again, the keyboard/mouse combo is currently the most popular control setup for most first-person shooters. Immersion demonstrated how the FEELit mouse could provide tactile response to Windows95 screen elements—slide your cursor over a scroll bar and you can actually feel it sliding into the groove. Resizing a window can produce a "stretching" sensation, and you can feel the cursor "pop" as you slide it from one menu choice to the next. Interface designers have known for years that integrating audio feedback into controls makes for a better interface... why not tactile feedback? The FEELit Mouse uses Immersion's I-FORCE technology (already supported by a number of games, including *Battlezone* and *F22 ADF*). Expect to see the FEELit Mouse in stores by the end of this year, with an expected street price around $139.00.

FEELit Mouse
Immersion Corporation
www.force-feedback.com

Creepy VR

If you think the "rocking, tilting jetfighter cockpit" is the pinnacle of inertia reproduction in games, you might want to take a look at this item. The Motionware headset is about the size of a pair of headphones, and it may be the Holy Grail for jet-jockeys who yearn for games that give them a sense of speed. Motionware uses galvanic stimulation of the body's vestibular apparatus (the organ in the inner ear that detects sensations of equilibrium) to produce a physical sensation of motion. The direction of the perceived motion mirrors what is seen on the monitor, so you can actually feel the rush of speed when you throttle your F-16 up to full military power. It may seem kind of creepy, but Virtual Motion gives their assurances that the device is perfectly safe to use (similar technology has been used in medical fields to diagnose balance disorders). Information on pricing was not available at the time of this writing, but Virtual Motion expects to offer Motionware to consumers via their web site sometime later this year.

Motionware
Virtual Motion
www.vm3.com

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Technology Reviews

Sound in 3D

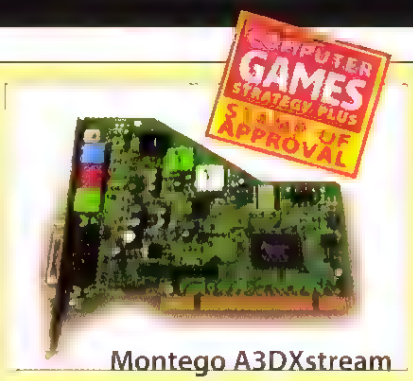
Where we once had few alternatives to the venerable Sound Blaster, the market is bursting at the seams with alternative sound hardware. These cards, many of which are PCI-, as opposed to ISA-based, usually offer more than basic digital sound, adding advanced wavetable MIDI and new features like 3D audio.

Two cards that offer these features are the Turtle Beach Montego A3DXstream and the Guillemot Game Theater 64: Dynamic 3D Edition. Beyond having incredibly long names, the two cards are more alike than different, offering low cost (around $99), 3D sound, easy installation, compatible with the majority of DirectX Windows 95 software, and fabulous sound.

The Montego, goofy name aside, is a superb sound card. A bus-mastering PCI card with a digital gameport, it installed painlessly and performed flawlessly. As with competing cards, the Montego will not work in a pure-DOS environment. It emulates a Sound Blaster Pro in a Windows 95 DOS session, but you'll want to keep your old ISA card if you're interested in running games in pure DOS. The card features the Aureal A3D sound chip, which delivers superb spatial sound with only two speakers or headphones.

The Game Theater 64 is an ISA card with a good old analog gameport, which gives it an advantage when it comes to DOS support. Its sound quality seems equal to the Montego—both produce incredibly clean samples, with little noise or distortion. Users with new machines, though, may not have room for an ISA card

Of the two cards, it's really a toss-up which card is better—each does an excellent job. However, we'll give the nod to the Turtle Beach card for its PCI interface and digital gameport. *–Steve Bauman*



Montego A3DXstream

Game Theater 64 3D Edition
Guillemot International
www.guillemot.com

Montego A3DXstream
Turtle Beach Systems
www.tbeach.com

Those other pesky senses

In real life, tactile sensations can be quite powerful. People often trust their sense of touch even when they doubt what their other senses are telling them. Even though force feedback has been around for some time, it has largely been discarded as a gimmick. A number of hardware developers have recently been gearing up to put some serious effort into attempts at force feedback, however, and it should be interesting to see what they come up with. The superficial reputation that force feedback has is largely a result of how it has been used, but the typical "vibrating joystick" response to firing a weapon is not the full extent of this technology's potential. As with visual immersion, the more subtle effects may actually be the most interesting ones—imagine how useful it would be to *feel* when your tires were about to loose traction in *NASCAR Racing 2*.

And touch is not the only sense that developers are exploring. Check out our preview of Virtual Motion's Motionware for a glimpse of a truly unique piece of virtual reality hardware. Could smell acceleration be next? You never know. Immersion is the bottom line, and as hardware developers continue to explore exactly what immersion is, the only thing that is clear is that it might not be what we first expect. ■

Mega Plextor

The UltraPleX 32X is the ultimate CD-ROM

While it's impossible to predict the future, the CD-ROM isn't going to die any time soon. Its installed base is too large, and its theoretical replacement, DVD, hasn't exactly set the computer world on fire. Based on published benchmarks, the tradeoff with most new DVD drives is poor CD-ROM performance. Since you're still doing most of your game playing from a CD-ROM, a fast unit can really improve the perceived performance of your machine, especially if you're plugging away with a single-digit speed CD-ROM. If you have a SCSI-based system, look no further than the Plextor UltraPleX 32X, a CD-ROM that provides staggering performance at a cost

The UltraPleX is an UltraSCSI CAV (Constant Angular Velocity) drive. It supports UltraSCSI 20MB/sec burst transfer rates with an UltraSCSI host adapter. According to Plextor, other high speed devices, such as hard drives, wil not be bogged down waiting for the CD-ROM (this has been a problem that has plagued IDE drives and CD-ROMs). The drive is available in either a tray or caddy model. It supports all current CD-ROM formats, including CD-Extra (CD-Plus), multi session, Enhanced CD, CD-R (CD-Recordable) media and CD-R/W (CD-Re Writable).

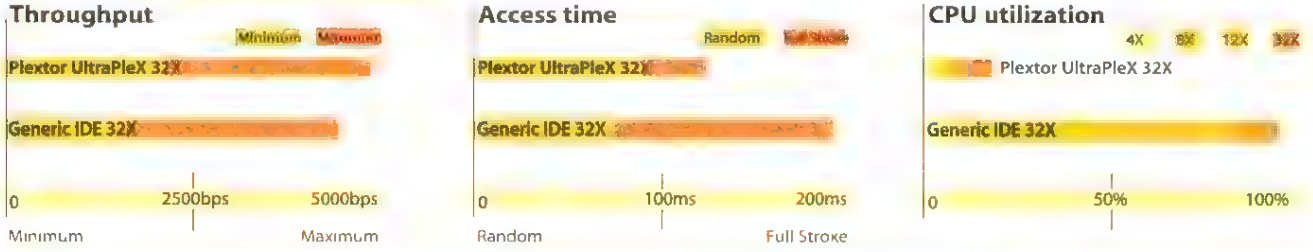
As with other high-speed CD-ROMs, it's a somewhat noisy drive, as it constantly spins up and down. However, included software allows you to set the length of time before it spins down. You can even (temporarily) set it to never completely spin down, which should help some games that access the CD infrequently

Looking at the performance, there are three main areas gamers should be interested in when testing a CD-ROM. The raw throughput, which measures how fast it can read data from large files; random access, which measures how quickly the drive can find data located on different areas of the CD-ROM; and CPU utilization, which measures how long your processor is used to transfer data from the drive buffer to system memory.

In our testing, using a 200MHz MMX Pentium with an Adaptec 2940UW Ultra-Wide SCSI controller, the UltraPleX 32X transferred data anywhere from 2MB/sec to 4.8MB/sec (the variance depends on the physical location of the data on the CD) with an 85ms access time. Comparing a 32X IDE drive to the UltraPlex shows them to be nearly equal in everything but CPU utilization. A Generic 32X IDE drive sucked up over 90% of the CPU, while the UltraPlex was just under 20%. What this means is that CPU intensive tasks, such as decompressing video or maps in a flight simulator, can actually take more time or cause skips even with the ultra-fast drives.

This performance does come at a price. At a list price of $229 for an internal drive, and $319 for an external model, it's not as cheap as those generic IDE CD-ROM drives. But with its stunning performance, it's definitely the drive of choice for high end users who are looking for cutting-edge hardware. *–Steve Bauman*

High performance



Testing conducted on a 200MHz MMX Pentium with CD Tach 98, from Testa Labs (http://tcd.abs.simplenet.com)

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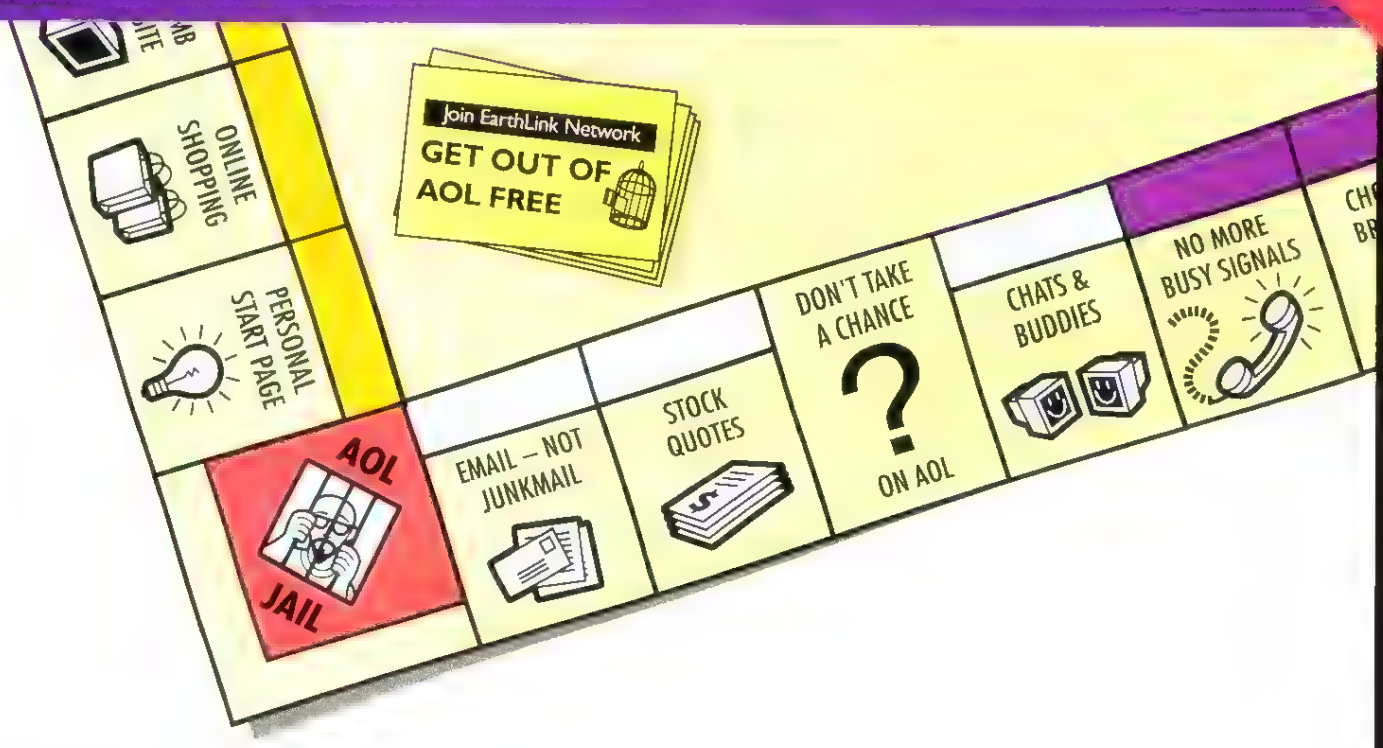

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Activision (Simulation)
Release: NOW
PC CD
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'CONFIRMED KILL' Choose from a wide range of historically accurate missions & hypothetical scenarios. Parameters (such as fight damage & gunnery models, red outs, black outs, sun blind spots, mid air collisions, ammunition loads, & fuel consumption) are adjustable for each scenario. Intuitive interface & virtual cockpit maximize situational awareness during battle.
Eidos(Simulation)
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HERETIC II This third-person action/adventure game based on the Quake II engine sets players on a quest through vast city & outdoor settings as they search for a cure to a deadly plague. Richly detailed environments, stunning special effects & challenging level designs. Features a variety of offensive & defensive spells to fight a multitude of plague-ridden enemies.
Activision (Action)
Release: 12/98
PC CD
$49.99

'DUKE NUKEM FOREVER' Duke is back and badder than before in this reboot sequel. Dr. Proton has taken over Area 51 & nuked Las Vegas. Making use of the Quake II engine, the team at 3D Realms promises not to disappoint with new weapons, new villains and full 3Dfx support. Multiplayer options & incredible lifelike environments.
GT Interactive (Action)
Release: 12/98
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$48.99

'TOTAL ANNIHILATION KINGDOMS' This fantasy real-time strategy game engages you in the struggle of good against evil and magic against technology. New storyline, 3-D articulated units, missions, multiplayer maps & worlds. Four selectable sides to choose from, each with its own unique magical & technological abilities.
GT Interactive (Strategy)
Release: 12/98
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Activision (Action)
Release: 5/98
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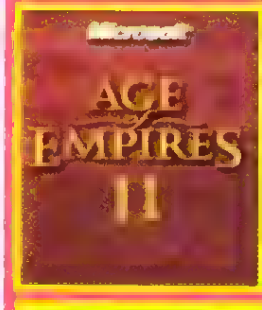

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Microsoft (Strategy)
Release: 12/98
PC CD

COMMANDOS BEHIND ENEMY LINES' This real-time combat game stresses strategy & tactics over firepower. Advanced AI controls over 40 enemy vehicles & troops. Features 24 missions in N Africa & Europe. 6 commandos with unique abilities. 25 accurately modeled weapons. 6 active cameras, & shadow & light effects. Multiplayer on LAN, Internet, & Mplayer.

Eidos (Strategy)
Release: 6/98
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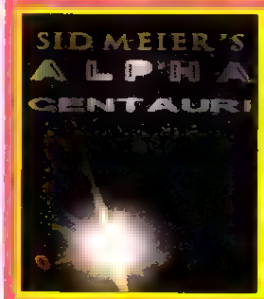

ALPHA CENTAURI' From the developer of Civilization & Gettysburg. A mothership's human cargo fleeing earth in the 22nd century splits into 7 factions in route to the settled destination. Colonists can terraform and changing topography to suit needs. Determine your infant civilizations modus operendi. Design your own military units.

Electronic Arts(Strategy)
Release: 8/98
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COMMAND & CONQUER 2' once again pits the GDI against the Brotherhood of NOD. Real-time strategy with all new engine, improved controls, dynamic 3D terrain, realistic physics & fully reactive environment. Multiple levels of warfare allow players to get up close or fight from afar. Travel under, over or on terrain. Support for 8 LAN players or one-on-one via the internet.

Virgin (Strategy)
Release: 9/98
PC CD

MYTH' is a tactical level real-time strategy game of fantasy warfare with an emphasis on multiplayer battles. This medieval universe features unprecedented realism and detail. Seasons change during the course of the game, affecting tactical decisions. Real 3D terrain, dynamic lighting and tricky artificial intelligence.

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Eidos (Roleplaying)
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Interplay (Action)
Release: 5/98
PC CD

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Interplay (Adventure)
Release: 10/98
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DAIKATANA Slash your way through time with the aid of your trusty sword. Chase down the evil Dr. Benedict through 4 different eras. Advance in multiple skill lev...ls such as Attack Power Attack Speed Running Speed Maximum Health and more. Incredible graphics and challenging A...

Eidos (Action)
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GT Interactive (Action)
Release: NOW
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Activision (Action)
Release: 11/98
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Flying the unfriendly skies

James Hunt's review of Jane's *F-15* [*CGS+ 92*] is off-base in a few of the statements, due to what appears to be a lack of research on Mr. Hunt's part.

When discussing the plane's power, he compares the F-15E modeled in the game with an F-15C. Same design, but different aircraft. The F-15E in the sim is modeled with the Pratt and Whitney "Dash 220" engines that were originally used for the Strike Eagle—these engines are rated at around 23000lbs thrust, which barely gives the Strike Eagle a 1:1 thrust to weight ratio unloaded. Even the newer "Dash 229" engines, with 29,000lbs thrust, give a slightly greater than 1.25:1 thrust to weight ratio. Add on the CFTs, and the bottom line is that a Strike Eagle is not the zoom climb monster that the F-15As and Cs are.

Had Mr. Hunt performed a bit of research, he'd know that *F-15* was never intended for multiplayer, and the head-to-head was added as an afterthought. He also compares it to *Longbow 2* when talking about the lack of multiplayer support ("Co-op play is one of the strongest features of *Longbow2*, and with the F-15E being a 2-seat aircraft, it was almost an expected feature"). *Longbow 2* was the multiplayer-enhanced follow up to *Longbow/Flash Point Korea*. The original *Longbow* (which is a two seat aircraft, last time I checked) did not have multiplayer either. Again, a week in the newsgroups or reading any review on *F-15* would have found Andy Hollis implying that a future version of the game (version 2, maybe?) will have co-op multiplayer support.

I don't mind a person not liking a simulation—each person has their own tastes. I do find it offensive when an author is blatantly wrong about facts.

Pete Marone
Via Internet

Whether or not F-15 *was intended for multiplayer from day one is irrelevant—a review addresses the features as implemented in the final product. The fact that multiplayer was, in your words, "an afterthought" adds even more credibility to the criticisms of that feature.*

As for your comments about a version 2 of F-15 *addressing most of these issues, you're probably right; however, that doesn't make the criticisms of this version factually incorrect. –ed*

Your review of Jane's *F-15* wasn't bad; however, I found flaw with your using an F-15C jock to tell you how an F-15E should fly. The F-15E unloaded will not accelerate in the vertical. The plane wasn't designed for it and with the addition of FAST packs and the second cockpit, weight is even more of a consideration. You're comparing two distinctly different aircraft even though they have virtually the same designation (much like the F/A-18A to the F/A-18E). There is no true comparison that way. Other than that, I think you hit it pretty much on target.

John Skibo
Senior Logistics Engineer
F/A-18 Retrofit
McDonnell Aircraft and Missiles System
The Boeing Company

Though the writer is aware of the differences between the two planes, he used the F-15C pilot as a source because he felt that he would possess more insight on flight modeling than a computer game reviewer. –ed

I usually take game reviews with a grain of salt, suspecting the reviewer is usually trying to help sell the game. Since I already owned *F-15*, I read this review with some considerable insight.

I think that it's the newest and best sim out there now, with truly ground breaking realism. But as I read your review of the game, I must say that I got the feeling this guy has actually played the game in depth, and his review was right on.

Keep up the good work.

surfdog
Via Internet

I just read your review of *F-15* and think its pretty much on the mark. While I love the sim, it has some glitches that you were kind enough to overlook. The argument that can't be won here is what is factually accurate and what isn't. I'll bet you could start a heated debate among actual F-15 pilots over the plane's performance.

Overall, it's a good simulation, not a great one, nor does it set any new standards in the market. I am patiently awaiting the next release, as I suspect we've beta tested this one long enough....

Randy King
Via Internet

Great review of Jane's *F-15*. The author summarized my feelings to a tee. I would love to see another review once a patch is released.

Leigh Woolley
Via Internet

WOOOOPS

I'm a dedicated fan of Games Workshop and all of the *Warhammer* games. In your review of *Chaos Gate* [*CGS+ 91*], you have this sentence: "one can almost imagine them [*Warhammer* players] ... demanding 'more WAARRGGHH!'" The orc cry is actually WAAAGGHH!— there are no "R"s.

Also on the fourth line of the second column there is a question as to whether there are female Ultramarines. There aren't any.

Matt
Via Internet

We must have been under the impression that the orcs were from Brooklyn, hence the "R"s would have existed but would have been silent. –ed

Beta tester praise

I am writing this in response to John Hamilton's letter "Beta Tester Revolt(ed)" [*CGS+ 91*]. I too have been a beta tester for Activision. I have tested *Interstate 76*, *Zork Grand Inquisitor*, and most recently *Battlezone*.

I have never had any of the problems John cited and have been very happy with the level of response that the beta test manager (Jonathan Moses) has given to me. My comments and criticisms were always promptly acknowledged and taken into consideration. I have never been made to feel "childish" or "immature" even when what I sent in a report might be considered that way.

I think John's experience is a very rare case and hope he is still testing. After all, good games require good beta testers.

Ken Rumsey
Kissimmee, FL

If you needed proof...

In the article "A Kaleidoscope of RPGs" by Cindy Yans, she wrote that "Certainly the pen and paper RPGers still exist, the ones that didn't follow Hale-Bopp, that is..." As a person who plays pen and paper RPGs, that statement is extremely offensive. It was completely uncalled for, and paints us as a bunch of insane psychopaths. With remarks like this, it's no wonder that the hobby as a whole has been under such constant attack for so many years. Maybe Ms. Yans should think twice before writing such remarks in the future. As of this letter, I will never, ever, buy another copy of your magazine again.

Adam Krump
Via Internet

That humor-removal operation sure is painful, isn't it, Mr. Krump? –ed

WE'RE LISTENING

Send all correspondence to editor@cdmag.com

Letters may be edited for space considerations.

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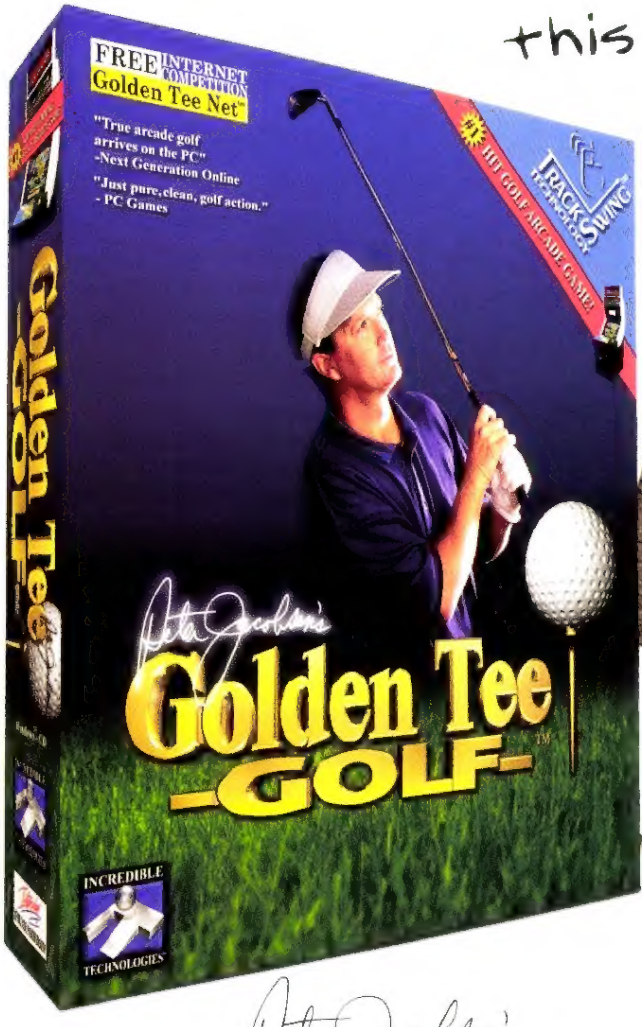

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